

THE Atlantic

JULY/AUGUST 2002

MONTHLY

AMERICAN GROUND:

Unbuilding the
World Trade Center

BY WILLIAM
LANGEWIESCHE

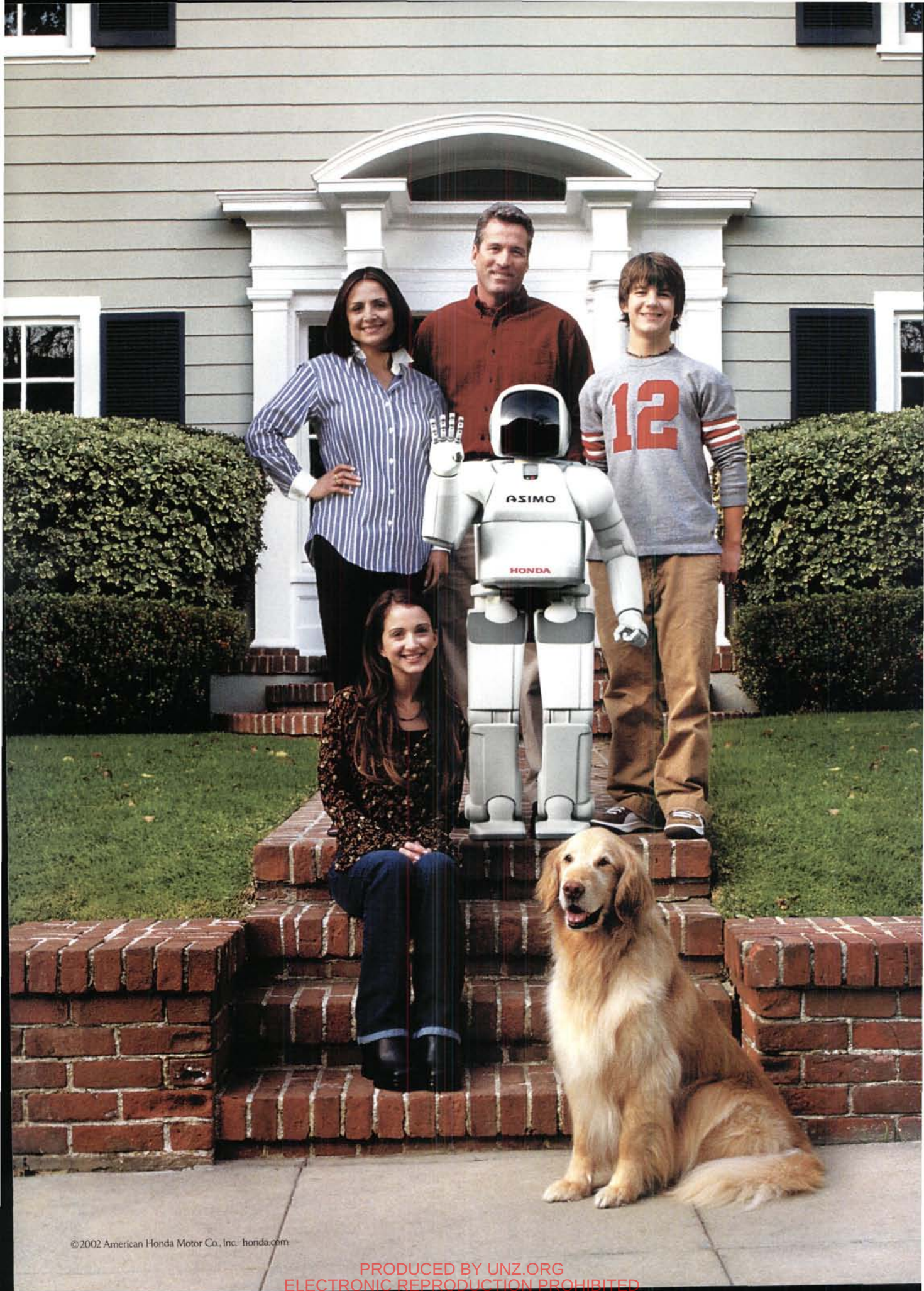
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THE Atlantic

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This month on the Web . . .

Interview: William Langewiesche discusses "American Ground," his article in this month's issue, and his experience at the World Trade Center site during the recovery effort.

Sounding: Edward Lear's endearing classic is read aloud by the poets Gail Mazur, Lloyd Schwartz, and Richard Wilbur, with an introduction by Schwartz.

Interview: Michael B. Oren talks about his new book, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, reviewed in New & Noteworthy.

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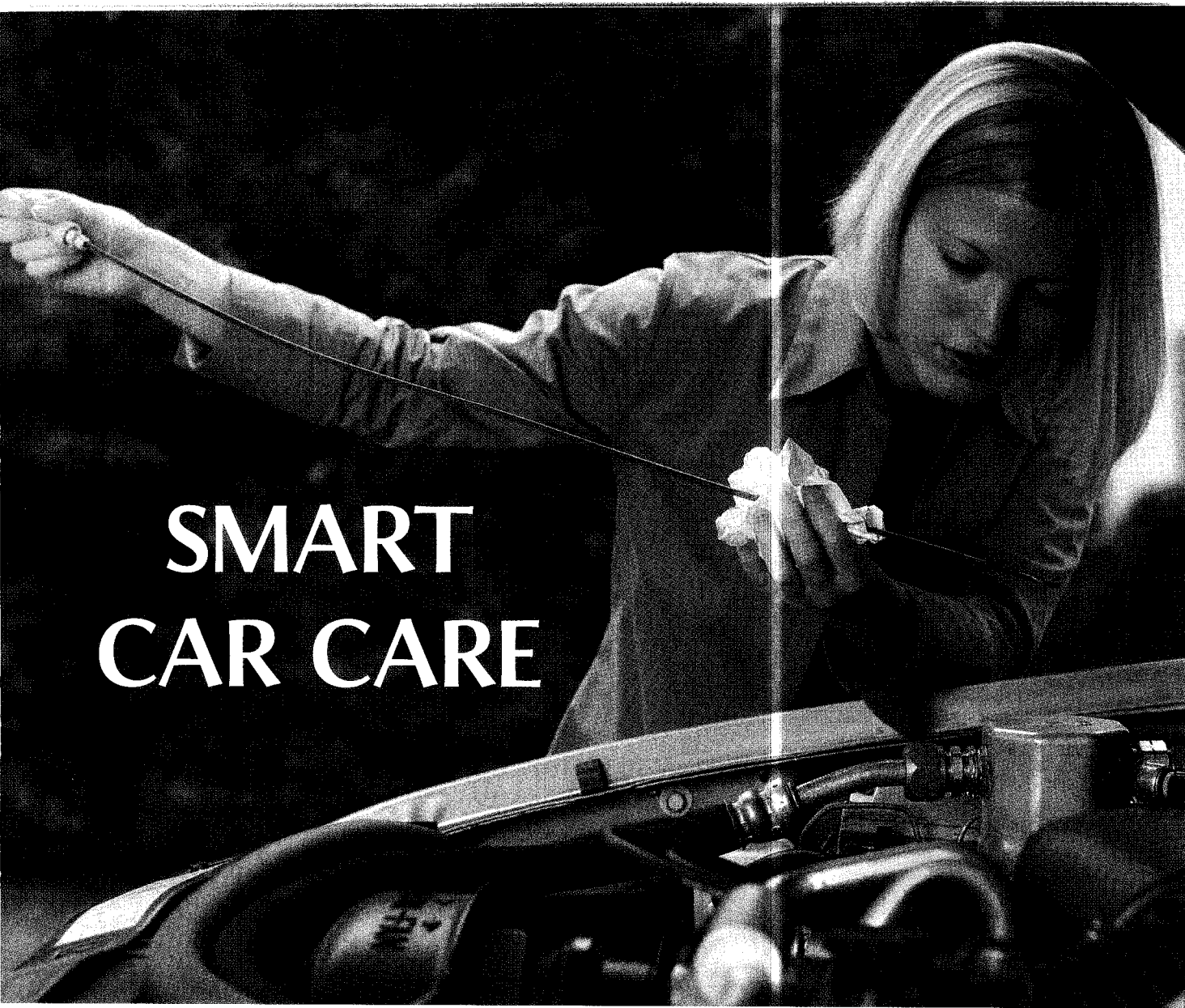
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JULY/AUGUST 2002

A black and white photograph of a woman with blonde hair, wearing a hoodie, leaning over the open hood of a car. She is holding a dipstick and appears to be checking the oil level. The background is dark and out of focus.

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77 NORTH WASHINGTON STREET

Shortly after the terrorist attacks against the United States last September, *The Atlantic*'s longtime correspondent William Langewiesche made contact with officials in the New York City department responsible for the recovery and removal effort at the World Trade Center site. Langewiesche's request was straightforward: he wanted unfettered, round-the-clock physical access to the site; free access to supervisors and workers there; and access to the meetings of city officials, engineers, construction companies, and consultants.

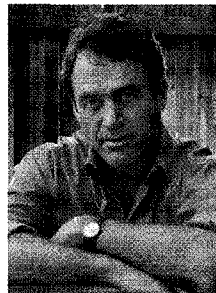
Unexpectedly, this request was granted, immediately and in full. Langewiesche became the only journalist to be "embedded"—to use the Pentagon term for reporters who live and travel with the units they cover—in the World Trade Center operation. In all he spent nine months at the site. The result is "American Ground: Unbuilding the World Trade Center," a three-part series that begins in this issue. It is the longest piece of original reporting ever undertaken by *The Atlantic Monthly*. Later this year the three articles commissioned by the magazine will be assembled into a book and published under the same title by North Point Press, a division of Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

William Langewiesche was granted such wholesale access for a simple reason: the people in charge were familiar with his work in these pages, work that has produced dramatic narratives built around human and technical complexity. During the more than ten years that Langewiesche has been a correspondent for *The Atlantic*, he has written about the U.S.-Mexican border, the ValuJet crash in Florida, the shipbreaking industry on the coast of India, and U.S. military operations in the Balkans, among other topics. Langewiesche has four times in the past been a finalist for the National Magazine Award, and his cover story of last November, about the suicidal plunge of Egypt-Air 990 into the Atlantic Ocean, won this year's award in the Reporting category. This month William Langewiesche joins James Fallows on our masthead as a national correspondent.

Langewiesche came to this magazine (with an article about the Sahara Desert) out of the clear blue sky; he had been a professional pilot, and had previously written primarily for aviation magazines. Several elements of that background—the bird's-eye perspective; the interest in details of technique and process; the calm demeanor; the canny assessment of human strengths and weaknesses; an appreciation of honesty not

only as a virtue but also as a survival skill—proved to be natural assets in his new profession as a roving journalist. In his reporting for "American Ground," Langewiesche explored the shifting debris with construction workers and engineers, documenting the crises and questions as they arose. He crawled through "the pile" with survey parties and descended deep below street level to areas where underground fires still burned and steel flowed in molten streams. He interviewed hundreds of people, from ironworkers and city managers to architects and doctors. What he witnessed in his reporting, Langewiesche says, was "uniquely American improvisation on an enormous scale."

LANGEWIESCHE WAS ONE OF SEVEN *Atlantic* contributors to be honored at the 2002 National Magazine Awards.



William Langewiesche

Caitlin Flanagan, who began contributing to the magazine only last year, was a finalist in the Reviews and Criticism category, for three review essays about books on college admissions, wedding planning, and tabloid newspapers. Flanagan lives in Los Angeles, and is now an *Atlantic* contributing editor. A group of three short stories—"The Hunter's Wife," by Anthony Doerr; "Digging," by Beth Lordan; and "Popular Girls," by Karen Shepard—was also a finalist, in the Fiction category.

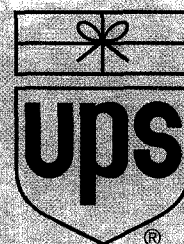
Samantha Power won the National Magazine Award in the Public Interest category, for her *Atlantic* article "Bystanders to Genocide" (September 2001), which challenged the conventional wisdom that "nothing could have been done" to mitigate the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. At a minimum, Power argued, a combination of bureaucratic inertia and political cowardice in Washington cost tens of thousands of lives. Power's reporting for her *Atlantic* article has now become part of a book, *A Problem From Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, which was published in March.

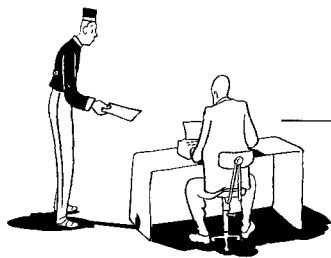
And Penny Wolfson won the National Magazine Award in the Feature Writing category, for her article "Moonrise" (December 2001), which described the battle of her teenage son, Ansel, with muscular dystrophy. Ansel's physical condition, already immensely difficult, will of course only worsen. Wolfson portrayed her remarkable son, her family, and their common perseverance with honesty and restraint, and even with humor. Ansel is scheduled to start as a freshman at Columbia University this fall. —THE EDITORS

We would like to pay tribute to all the individuals and institutions that have contributed to the recovery and cleanup effort at the World Trade Center site. The determined, creative, and resilient spirit embodied in the enormous effort is a source of pride for all Americans.

We are particularly proud of our respective employees' commitment to helping others through this difficult period. Their contributions, big and small, reflect the larger role that American companies can play in our local communities and in the life of our nation—a role that we hope will continue to be embraced by all American businesses and their employees.

To all involved, we salute you.





LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hitchens on Churchill

I was eager to see how Christopher Hitchens would handle the flood of new books re-evaluating Winston Churchill's role in World War II ("The Medals of His Defeats," April *Atlantic*), but my reading ground to a halt right on the first page, at the paragraph that poses questions about who was first to act. Let's look at the three cases cited:

"Against which nation was the first British naval attack directed?" Why, against Germany, of course, since the naval war began with the Royal Navy's campaign to destroy German commerce raiders like the *Graf Spee*, in 1939, and to contain the U-boats. Severe sea battles against the German navy occurred off the Norwegian coast in early April of 1940. Hitchens's answer is "Against a non-mobilized French fleet ... in North Africa." Hmm.

"Which air force was the first to bomb civilians, and in whose capital city?" The answer given is "The RAF, striking the suburbs of Berlin." That is perhaps the most egregious reply of the three. Did not the war open with the ruthless Luftwaffe bombing of the cities and civilians of Poland, especially Warsaw, even before the British Parliament had declared war?

Finally, "Which belligerent nation was the first to violate the neutrality of Europe's noncombatant nations?" "The British, by a military occupation of Norway"—wrong again. German forces landed on Norwegian soil before the Anglo-French expedition, though by just a few days. Germany had already invaded Denmark before the Allied landing in Norway. I suppose we are not allowed to include Stalin's invasion of Finland, on November 30, 1939, because Russia was not a "belligerent nation." At least not until it invaded. Again, hmm.

I am not saying that Hitchens himself is making these false claims; indeed, he cautiously opens the paragraph by referring to "events that one thinks cannot really be true," as if suspecting already that some of the authors are bent on a "trash Churchill" vendetta. But if this sort of misinformation gets widely circulated, it will make the task of assessing Churchill's strengths and weaknesses—his role in history, wars and all—more difficult than it actually is.

Paul Kennedy
Dilworth Professor of History
Yale University
New Haven, Conn.

I was amused by Christopher Hitchens's statement that Churchill's "declining years in retirement were a protracted, distended humiliation of celebrity-seeking and gross overindulgence." It is worth remembering that this was the period during which Churchill wrote the acclaimed *The Second World War*, in six volumes, and *A History of the English-Speaking Peoples*, in four volumes. We all know that Winston liked his brandy, but to paraphrase Abraham Lincoln's comment on being told that General Grant had a tendency to tittle, "Perhaps we should find out what brand he drank, and order a barrel!"

Ellicott McConnell
Easton, Md.

Christopher Hitchens mentions the Norman Shelley canard, and Churchill's alleged drunkenness.

On June 4, 1940, Churchill delivered his "We shall fight on the beaches ..." speech to the House of Commons. Afterward the Prime Minister went to the BBC studio at Shepherd's Bush to deliver the same address, which would be beamed to the Commonwealth nations and the United States. Unfortunately, the transcription apparatus broke down at the

BBC. Although it went out live, the BBC did not have an oral recording. They asked Churchill to come back and deliver it again. Churchill refused. So Norman Shelley, the voice of Winnie-the-Pooh on the BBC, who was known for his clever mimicking of Churchill, delivered—unbeknownst to Churchill—the address. The Shelley rendition was for excerpts in later news and for records to be played at bond rallies and patriotic events.

As to the drinking charge, Lord Moran, Churchill's physician, in his not very sympathetic biography, said flatly that he never saw any evidence of Churchill's drunkenness.

The typical alcoholic conceals his intake. Churchill, however, would brag of his drinking. But he claimed more than he consumed. He would constantly top off his own glass of whiskey or brandy with more soda water from the siphon bottle—while replenishing the glasses of his guests with spirits. I must say that many people have come to tell me how Churchill seemed tipsy at a reception before dinner and then later delivered a masterly address. The reason is that Churchill could not control his lisp and stutter in conversation. The result was a "slathering" of words. In his speeches, which he carefully prepared, he could control his lisp and stutter.

Finally, despite the duties of high parliamentary office, Churchill produced more published words than Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and John Steinbeck combined. That in itself belies the drunkenness charge. In addition, no one with a drinking problem could live past the age of ninety, as Churchill did.

James C. Humes
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Norman Shelley did not broadcast Churchill's speeches. The BBC has gone into this in tremendous detail and has discovered that the original recordings were mislabeled.

Andrew Roberts
London, England

Norman Shelley's ridiculous notion that he delivered Churchill's war-time speeches over the BBC, fanned assiduously by David Irving, has for years been laid to rest by eyewitness testimony. What Shelley recorded, *after* the war, was an obscure, unpublished Churchill speech, the origin of which has eluded even the Churchill Archives. Amusingly, Hitchens even gets the lie wrong: Shelley's role in *The Children's Hour* was Dennis the Dachshund, not Winnie-the-Pooh. Poor Shelley can't win.

Richard M. Langworth
The Churchill Center
Hopkinton, N.H.

I found it interesting that your April Issue contained both an article on plagiarism, by Richard A. Posner, and an example of the point Posner was making. Christopher Hitchens includes a paragraph comparing Churchill and Lincoln that ends with the sentence "In his contradictions he contained multitudes." That's nicely lifted from Walt Whitman ("Song of Myself"), and I'm left wondering if Hitchens assumed that his readers would recognize the line (and appreciate the Lincoln-to-Whitman-to-Churchill literary double play). Whether used intentionally or not, it made for a brilliant ending to the paragraph, allowing it to "glitter with stolen gold," in Posner's words.

Mark Hiza
Exeter, N.H.

Christopher Hitchens replies:

Paul Kennedy is obviously not accusing me of not knowing the date of the outbreak of war. It goes without saying that any meeting between British and German naval vessels was by definition hostile any time after September 3, 1939, and of course there were several exchanges of fire in that time. However, there was nothing like a premeditated fleet action, coordinated across a wide area, until the simultaneous bombardment

of the French at both ends of the Mediterranean, which Churchill considered to be a hinge event in a way that the other engagements were not. My purpose in pointing this out was to challenge the received opinion, so I don't mind restating it.

Professor Kennedy again mistakes my purpose in asking which air force struck first at whose capital. In the context I was clearly asking this as between London and Berlin during World War II. If I had wanted to ask which capital was the first to be bombed (since Professor Kennedy himself says that the bombing of Warsaw was before the declaration of war), I would have chosen Madrid, bombed by the Nazis at a time when Churchill was still on their side in Spain.

The British invaded Norwegian territorial waters on April 8, 1940, in order to push ships carrying iron ore into international waters. That was a clear violation of neutrality. The German attack on Scandinavia began the next day. And again, had I wanted to discuss neutrality in general, I could have cited the Molotov-Ribbentrop carve-up of the Baltic States, which preceded the Soviet invasion of Finland. (Incidentally, Churchill himself declared war on Finland, in order to gratify Stalin, in December of 1941.)

In 1990 a Cambridge, Massachusetts, speech-research group named Sensimetrics tested twenty of the BBC broadcasts sold on long-playing records under Churchill's name. The voice patterns were different in three speeches: the "Fight on the Beaches" speech, the "Finest Hour" speech, and the "Blood, Toil, Tears, and Sweat" speech. Ten years later Norman Shelley's son found an LP of his father delivering the "Fight on the Beaches" oration, which was verified by a professional sound engineer and also by the presence of Shelley's own voice at the end of the recording. There is now only a dispute about when, and how often, Shelley (who did also play Winnie-the-Pooh for the BBC) acted as His Master's Voice.

I should not want to quarrel with those who argue that alcohol and rhetoric can be advantageously mixed, and I hope I did not say anything to offend those who believe otherwise. However, some of Churchill's worst speeches were delivered from the bottle's mouth, and some of his best could not, as we now have reason to know, have been delivered at all without the deputizing of an impersonator. His later histories both suffer from defects and, as with the case of the

Katyn massacre, contain unpardonable and self-interested revisions of the truth. As to longevity, an entirely pickled Queen Mother has just died at the age of 101.

Finally, I confess myself quite caught out by the relentless detective work of Mark Hiza. I am confident that had I written that Churchill asked his people for the last full measure of devotion, or that he bestrode the narrow world like a colossus, another sleuth would have found me out just as skillfully.

Cross-dressers

Amy Bloom ("Conservative Men in Conservative Dresses," April *Atlantic*) says she doesn't "want to demonize or pathologize any sexual preference or behavior that doesn't hurt anyone." But cross-dressing does hurt people! It hurts the women who were lied to, and who are abandoned when they cannot respond sexually to their cross-dressing mates. It hurts children of the divorce, many of whom will never understand why Dad left. Both Mom and Dad will keep Dad's secret, assuming that it is something the children should never know.

Research from East Tennessee State University indicates that the women involved with cross-dressing partners are usually first-born children, and tend to be more liberal and more highly educated than average. They are, as Bloom points out, not lacking in self-esteem. In fact, it is their strong self-esteem that allows them to accept relationships with their cross-dressing mates. This may, however, become a threat to the cross-dresser, posing a contradiction—the need for a woman strong enough to accept his cross-dressing, but one sensitive to his sexual needs.

Cathy Connellan
Sterling Heights, Mich.

As a married heterosexual cross-dresser, I must take issue with Ray Blanchard's heated (to use Amy Bloom's characterization) assertion "Of course it's not relaxing. Heels and makeup and a wig and a corset? It's preposterous." For me, wearing these and other associated habiliments is indeed relaxing, if not physically then psychologically, and I know from their personal attestations that other cross-dressers agree. Blanchard would be surprised at how truly comfort-

able a properly fitted and laced corset is!

For the record, and contrary to Bloom's composite portrait, my wife is a professional with a master's degree, and in the thirty years I have been a registered voter, I cannot remember once voting for a Republican.

Jamie Roberts
Lightfoot, Va.

Virgil's Prose?

I was surprised to see a reference to the "prose" of Virgil's *Aeneid* in a magazine as literate and sophisticated as this ("An Ireland of Legend," March *Atlantic*). Though the general reader may consider it a technical point, the distinction between prose and poetry is worth affirming. As the *Oxford English Dictionary* makes clear, the former refers to the "ordinary form of written or spoken language, without metrical structure," the latter to a "composition in verse or metrical language." The point of difference is meter, a system of linguistic measurement arising from natural structures within the native language. We need not know the technical term for the metrical system of Virgil's *Aeneid*—dactylic hexameter—to realize that the epic is composed of regularly measured lines, or that it most assuredly is not in an "ordinary form" of language.

Andrew Ciotola
Stadler Center for Poetry
Bucknell University
Lewisburg, Pa.

Jacki Lyden replies:
Mea culpa.

Burning Question

Cullen Murphy's "Delete, Baby, Delete" (May *Atlantic*) gave as an example of effective deletion the burning of a handwritten manuscript of Thomas Carlyle in 1835. The story I recall reading somewhere, perhaps in your pages, about Carlyle's burnt manuscript has it done by his own servant, not by John Stuart Mill's maid. Also, the deletion failed. It left intact Carlyle's memory bank. After the destruction of the written word (according to my account, which makes Murphy's point better than his

account), Carlyle simply sat down and rewrote the entire volume from memory, word for word. An effective deletion in this case would have involved burning not only the manuscript but Carlyle.

Jim Lein
Minot, N.D.

Cullen Murphy replies:

No, it was Mill's maid. But Jim Lein's point about memory is apt.

A General Rule

In language, long-standing tradition signals legitimacy. If so, Word Court "Judge" Barbara Wallraff (March *Atlantic*) is mistaken to rule that the title "General" is reserved for the military. In many southern states (south of Boston, anyway) it has long been proper to address an attorney general as "General." In the Supreme Court of the United States—a higher court than Word Court—the U.S. Attorney General, the U.S. Solicitor General, and state attorneys general are addressed as "General" by the justices.

It is therefore both legitimate and appropriate for Secretary Fleischer to refer to "General Ashcroft."

Wayne E. Uhl
Carmel, Ind.

Barbara Wallraff replies:

I called Nina Totenberg, National Public Radio's legal-affairs correspondent, to ask if she agrees with Wayne Uhl. "He's generally right," she told me. "I've always heard the Supreme Court justices call the Attorney General of the United States 'General.' I don't normally hear them call the Solicitor General 'General'—they don't usually call him anything; he's there all the time. When state attorneys general argue cases before the Court, if the justices are going to address them as anything, they usually call them 'General.'" With respect to jurist generals, then, Word Court stands overruled, and thanks to Wayne Uhl for bringing this to our attention.

It remains true, nonetheless, that most civilians with the word "general" in their job titles are not properly addressed as "General." The letter Uhl refers to asked about "civilian generals" of all sorts: "Surgeon, Solicitor, Comptroller, Director, and so forth," as its author put it. The Office of the Surgeon General tells me that the appropriate cour-

tesy title is either "Dr." or "Vice Admiral" (because the Surgeon General heads up a uniformed corps of the Department of Health and Human Services)—never "General." And according to a spokesperson for the Comptroller General of the United States, the right title to use for the incumbent, David M. Walker, is plain old "Mr."

Tennis

Marshall Jon Fisher ("Tennis on the Green," May *Atlantic*) writes, "I approve of tennis's transformation thirty years ago from an upper-class diversion to an inclusive public sport." In 1983 I suggested as much to Pauline Betz, the great champion of the 1940s, and she quickly quashed my notion of exclusivity. She and the other great champions all grew up playing on public courts. Of twenty-six world champions I interviewed for my book, *Once a Champion*, only Boston's Sarah Palfrey had a privileged background.

If you were to tell Don Budge, Alice Marble, Louise Brough, Jack Kramer, and Gardner Mulloy, all of whom played before World War II and in its aftermath, that the game they played so well was an upper-class diversion, you'd be ducking tennis balls whizzing at your noggin.

Stan Hart
West Tisbury, Mass.

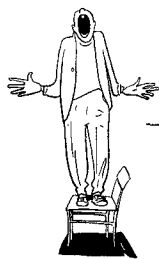
Marshall Jon Fisher replies:

Stan Hart is absolutely right. I should have written "over the past hundred years" instead of "thirty years ago." I hope that Don Budge et al. are not subscribers.

Advice & Consent

Regarding "Slow Squeeze," by Michael Kelly (The Agenda, May *Atlantic*): As a person involved in the B-52 activities during 1968, I would like to correct a misleading statement that the bombing campaign ended on October 31, 1968. I believe that Michael Kelly meant to say "Bombing north of the DMZ in North Vietnam ended on October 31, 1968." Certainly considerable bombing occurred in that theater of operation until well into the 1970s.

Paul LeMenager
Bethlehem, Pa.



INNOCENT BYSTANDER

by CULLEN MURPHY

FROM SOUP TO NUTS

The categorical imperative

.....

“Grilled slice of fresh foie gras served with a stew of corn, red beans, chickpeas, green peas, and duck jus.”

“Beef short ribs braised in a rich Khmer broth with fresh ginger, garlic, young coconut juice, mushroom soy, tamarind, and chiles.”

“Roasted lamb loin with a light curry sauce, garnished with plantain, mango, raisins, and couscous tabouleh.”

“Tuna tartare with fresh wasabi, Sevruga caviar, cucumber, radish, and a Meyer lemon coulis.”

These descriptions, drawn from different menus, exemplify the modern restaurant practice of listing as many exotic components as possible. The supporting ingredients surround the central item like vainglorious courtiers around a prince—the gastronomic equivalent, perhaps, of Velázquez’s *The Surrender of Breda*. The descriptions can be enticing. But for me, at least, they also have an unintended consequence—they call attention to the sheer number of life forms required to produce every fancy dish. Start taking inventory and the task quickly gets out of hand. Dozens of plants and animals and fungi may be involved in a few tablespoons of sauce. The simplest glass of wine once teemed with enabling microbes. So whenever Justin, who will be my server tonight, reads from his card of specials, a portion of my mind dwells not on the choices but on a larger question: How many different species participated in the creation of this menu? Five hundred? Five times that many?

Which leads to an even more sobering question: How many different species does a human being make use of in the course of a lifetime? Cro-Magnon Person was a more sophisticated creature than we tend to think, profoundly

knowledgeable about the plant and animal worlds and capable of bending nature mightily to human will—but this ancestor of ours probably drew upon only a few thousand species, all told. The average American is in another league. Just the books on one’s shelves may embody the contributions of hundreds of kinds of trees. Pharmaceuticals are species-intensive, and our medicine cabinets are crowded. Every package of processed food is a small Noah’s ark of biodiversity (even if many of the species, to judge from the lists of ingredients, are



traveling under assumed names). The organisms represented in a Big Mac easily add up to a couple of dozen. Include everything that goes into home furnishings, and all the contents of drawers and closets, and the numbers mount rapidly. I wouldn’t be surprised if Americans made use of 100,000 or more distinct species during a lifetime.

But we still have a long way to go—or so I concluded after learning about an enterprise called the All Species Foundation. This is not, as you might fear, the research-and-development arm of the restaurant industry. The All Species Foundation was established two years ago by a consortium of scientists and publishers (among them Stewart Brand, the creator of the *Whole Earth Catalog*),

and its goal is to conduct an All Species Inventory—to name and classify, within the next twenty-five years, every living thing on earth. “If we discovered life on another planet,” the foundation’s manifesto states, “the first thing we would do is conduct a systematic inventory of that planet’s life. This is something we have never done on our home planet.”

It is an enormous undertaking, though just how enormous no one actually knows. Some 1.7 million plants, animals, and microbes have been named and classified during the past few centuries, and the estimates of how many remain undiscovered range from seven million to more than a hundred million. The foundation believes that new technologies for finding and identifying species (remote viewers, DNA samplers, cheap electron microscopes), together with the Internet and a few billion dollars, will empower naturalists around the world and make a global inventory possible.

The All Species Inventory represents, of course, the taxonomist’s ultimate quest. Taxonomy is the science of classification—in this case, the classification of living things, a process that involves not only giving them names but also sorting them into orderly groups based on natural relationships. It is an endeavor that in its modern scientific form goes back to the Swedish naturalist Carolus Linnaeus, who in the eighteenth century devised the official Latin naming system (*Homo sapiens*, *Bacillus anthracis*) and also took the first stab at arranging organisms into categories. Much of his schema remains intact, though large parts have been revised as science has advanced. The All Species Inventory will almost certainly bring major revisions in the presumed order of things.

The ambitions of the All Species Foundation have earned praise from

GREG CLARKE



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some quarters and skepticism from others. The scope of the effort, some critics say, verges on the preposterous. We aren't even sure, they go on, what the precise definition of "species" is. I'm not going to step into the middle of this debate, beyond observing that the human urge to render phenomena into categories is more powerful than any critique of that urge will ever be. The Book of Genesis begins with a taxonomy of species. Aristotle divided the animal kingdom into vertebrates and invertebrates, and the plant kingdom into herbs, shrubs, and trees. "The construction of categories is a basic human imperative," the biologist Jody Hey writes in *Genes, Categories, and Species*, a provocative new book that shows how our cognitive wiring often dictates the way we divvy up nature. The human brain has an affinity for patterns even when they're trivial: one day last spring, after a Barry Bonds home run, a television sportscaster noted that this was "the fifth successive year Bonds has homered on April 13." Indeed, the brain is so inclined to discern patterns that it finds them where none exist—producing phrenologists, Spenglerians, conspiracy theorists, and political consultants.

The great animating principle behind most productive human endeavor is the resistance to entropy, the impulse toward order. That virtually anything at all can be perceived in categorical terms underlies everything from Twenty Questions to the Dewey decimal system to sentences that begin with the words "There are two kinds of people ..." The process of filling out a tax return amounts to a strenuous exercise in personal taxonomy ("railroad employee"; "qualifying widow"; "married filing jointly").

I keep a small but representative collection of taxonomic schemata in a folder—a kind of petting zoo. It is broken down, needless to say, into categories. Psychology, for instance, has given us taxonomies of personalities (the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) and of dreams ("falling or drowning," "naked or dressed"). Scholars have picked apart popular culture, producing humorless taxonomies of jokes ("inferential," "paradoxical") and numbing taxonomies of graffiti ("folk epigraphy," "latrinalia").

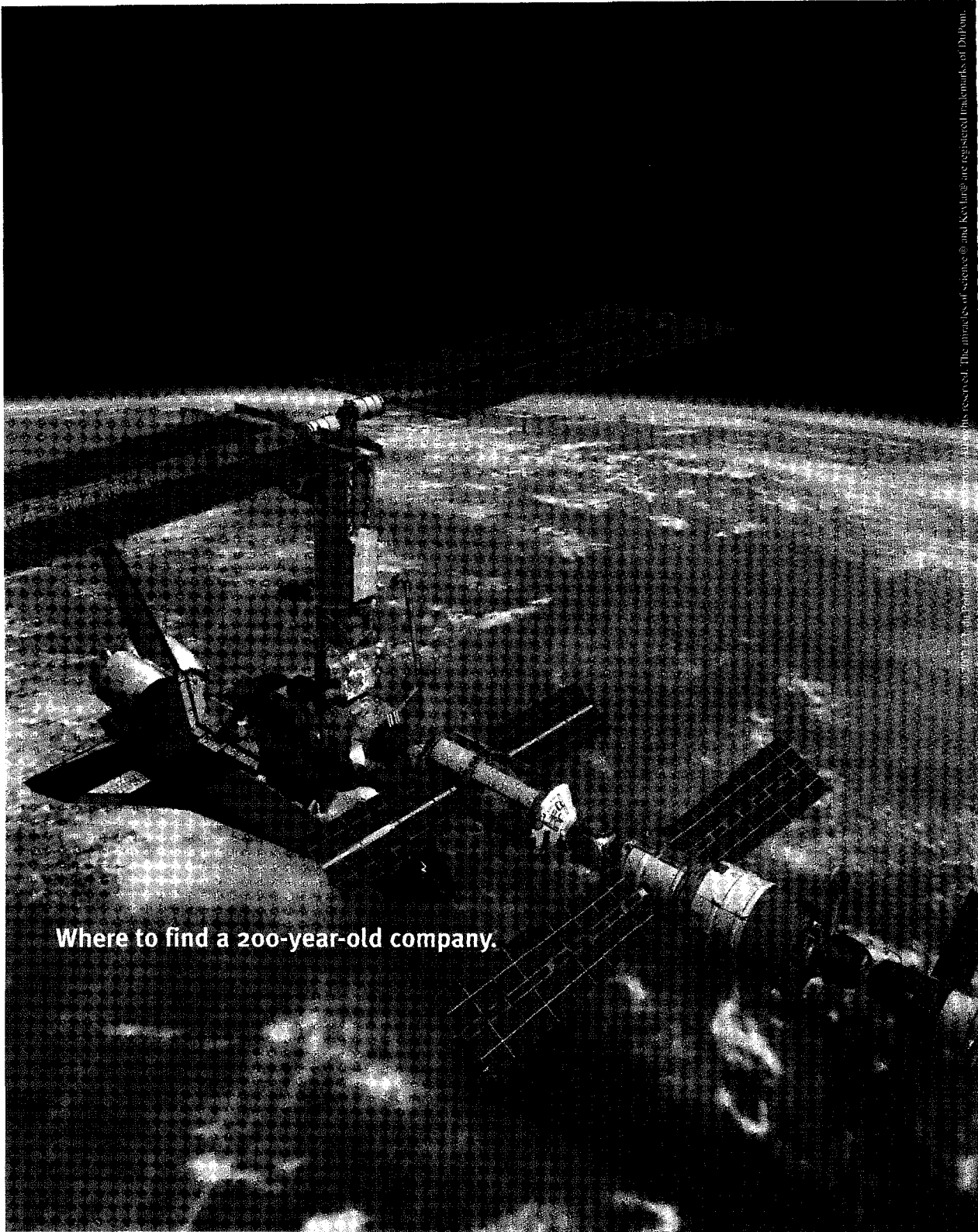
In the realm of religion, the taxonomy of demons encompasses fates and furies, deluders and ensnarers, incubi and succubi. A Web-site spreadsheet from the University of Notre Dame displays an intricate theological taxonomy of the passions. Under the rubric *dolor* ("pain") come the subcategories *poenitentia* ("sorrow for one's moral sins"), *invidia* ("sorrow at someone else's good"), and *acedia* ("sorrow that debilitates by taking away even the desire to escape"). Under the rubric *timor* ("fear") come *erubescencia* ("fear of what others will think of you if you act in a given way") and *agonia* ("fear of an unanticipated evil").

The taxonomic impulse has its foes. A recent screed in the e-zine *Turk's Head Review* railed against the underlying organizational principles of the Yahoo! search engine: "To pigeonhole is to imprison. To categorize is to suck some of the lifeblood out of the living for the sake of convenience and fast retrieval." What this writer probably means is that the organizational principles don't accord with his own. And who can fail to sympathize? Probably all of us have entertained visions of how reality might better be organized.

Thus the unimaginative division of world literature into national subliterations may make a certain kind of sense. But a much more useful scheme would be to categorize books according to the age at which it is best to read them—for instance, "while in college," "not until you've had children," "only after you're sixty." There are usually good scientific reasons for assigning animals to one species or another, but many people recognize that some kinds of dogs (Pekingese, Pomeranians, Chihuahuas) are as a conceptual matter actually cats, and the biological charts should reflect that fact. The Greeks considered the four elements to be Earth, Air, Fire, and Water—how could they have forgotten about Hype? And although everyone is familiar with the classic assignment of all comestibles to five nutritional "food groups," many people would appreciate a prior division of all foods into the two categories that really matter: "things you want to eat now" and "things you'll wish in thirty years you had eaten instead."

I should add, by the way, that the foie gras and short ribs were great. ■

Cullen Murphy is *The Atlantic's* managing editor.



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THE AGENDA

ESSAYS THIS MONTH *on the forgotten history of Yasir Arafat, why we should remember the Tokyo firebombing, and how police interrogations might better serve justice.*

DAVID BROOKS

"Arafat is the most bizarre political leader in the world today. He's never had anything like a regular home life. He has no interest in comforts, possessions, or normal pleasures. He has no interest in social issues, books, or cultural matters." PAGE 20

JONATHAN RAUCH

"Perhaps America's quiet way of paying its debt to the dead of Tokyo has been to take unprecedented pains, far beyond anything done by any other great power, to design and deploy weapons and tactics that spare civilian lives." PAGE 22

MARGARET TALBOT

"Videotaping of interrogations is one of those rare innovations that can help either side in the criminal-justice system, for the simple reason that it serves the quest to find out what really happened." PAGE 24

P. J. O'ROURKE

"A kid waved an American flag that had corporate logos instead of stars on the blue field. He was wearing Adidas shoes, a Swiss Army watch, and a Mountainsmith backpack." PAGE 28

MARK LEE

"The Timorese put all these people in the same category: they're 'internationals'—members of a large and rootless global culture that inevitably establishes itself in the world's trouble spots." PAGE 35

THE TASTE BUSINESS

What foreigners love to hate about America is also what they love to buy

.....

The spring issue of the literary quarterly *Granta* carried essays on America from twenty-four non-American writers. Most of the essays were thoughtful, perhaps because most of the essayists had been thinking about America for much of their lives. Almost all of them wrote of their first exposure to America as an epiphany never really gotten over.

"I still remember America coming into our neighbourhood, our house, when I was a child," the Lebanese Hanan al-Shaykh wrote. "The full moon's fuller in America," was the saying Yang Lian remembered from life in China in the 1940s. "Ever since I was a child I have been losing friends and relatives to America," Raja Shehadeh wrote from the West Bank. "There was something so free, so untethered about them," the Egyptian writer Ahdaf Soueif recalled of her first encounter with American short stories.

Cassandras of our times are necessarily and fundamentally Cassandras about America, because America so permeates our times. Left-leaning Cassandras find America appalling because it is imperial. "It is a fully-fledged, award-winning, gold-plated monster [that] has effectively declared war on the world," was how Harold Pinter put it, in the only really stupid essay in the *Granta* collection. Right-leaning Cassandras find it appalling that America is not imperial enough. But on the matter of American culture the left and the right find common ground. This is a matter more of intellectual and aesthetic values than of ideological ones: America is appalling because it is simply appalling. Here Gore Vidal and William J. Bennett and Susan Sontag and Norman Pod-

horetz can agree to agree. Here is where it seems even France has a point.

It is true that there is a perpetual wonder to the richness and the variety of the aesthetic awfulness of America. It is not just Bill and Monica and reality TV and talk TV and trash TV and Ozzy Osbourne on MTV and eyebrow rings and the spectacle of a people setting world obesity records who choose this precise moment in history to expose more of their flesh than ever before. It is everything and every-

where and evermore.

A few years ago, at the once stuffy, now trashy, yet inexplicably still stuffy White House Correspondents' Association Dinner, in Washington, D.C., *George* magazine—Exhibit 7,432,514 in the case for the decline and fall of it all—invited as one of its guests the pornographer Larry Flynt. As it happens, Flynt once published nude paparazzi photographs of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, the mother of the man who brought Flynt to dinner, *George's* founder and editor in chief, John F. Kennedy Jr. I thought then that this moment had to be some sort of unsurpassable low: the son of a former President bringing to a formal dinner with the current President a man who put his mother, the former First Lady, in a skin magazine. Of course it wasn't an unsurpassable moment; it was hardly even a moment.

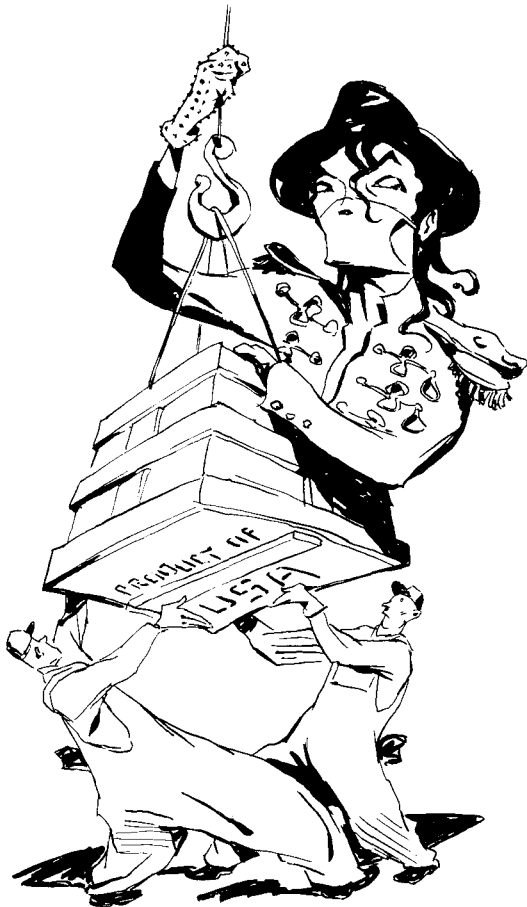
When those of us who are at least social members of the Everything's Going to Hell school speak about what is wrong with America, what we most often have in mind is the thing that brought Flynt and Kennedy together—the mass culture of entertainment and celebrity. It can be argued that this culture isn't all

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**MICHAEL
KELLY**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TIM BOWER

that new or different. As the better class of visitors to America has long pointed out, we have always been oafs. Lamentations about the current abysmal state of American culture invite the response "When, exactly, was that Golden Age? Before or after Jerry Lewis?"

Still, it is a fact that we made *Rugrats*. We made *Fear Factor*. We made *American Pie*. We make things that make parody impossible—did you catch the *Celebrity Boxing* match between Tonya Harding and Paula Jones? Of course, that's our



low culture. In our defense it must be said that we have a high culture, too. In recent years alone we have given the world the novels of Bret Easton Ellis, the photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe, the films of Oliver Stone, and the political philosophy of Michael (Stupid White Men) Moore. A big high-concept art moment a few years ago was a photograph called *Piss Christ*, featuring a crucifix submerged in urine. This season it's a musical called *Urinetown*. The mind boggles contemplating sequelae. As the lawyers say, let's just stipulate here.

So we make a lot of trash. But does

this mean that we *are* trash—the ugly Americans, a people whose aesthetics reflect a moral vacuum? This notion informs the hatred of America that runs in a clear line from the English and French intellectual left to the café talk of Greece and Italy to the diatribes of the Wahhabi mosques. And it puzzles admirers of America, who find that the individual Americans they meet seem often to be quite nice people: pleasant, intelligent, educated—civilized, in fact.

In fact, American mass-entertainment culture does not reflect America or Americans properly or fully, and the reason has to do with the size of the mass.

There is a sign from yesterday that you can see from the train as it passes through Trenton, New Jersey: TRENTON MAKES—THE WORLD TAKES. Trenton doesn't make much of anything that matters anymore. Entertainment is what we make now, entertainment and its spinoff product, celebrity. In 2000 the categories of industry defined by the government as television and radio, motion pictures, and amusement and recreation accounted for \$187.9 billion, or 1.9 percent, of the gross domestic product. Printing and publishing added another \$105.5 billion, for another 1.1 percent. Altogether, these industries accounted for three percent of a GDP of \$9.9 trillion. By comparison, all of farming, agricultural services, forestry, and fishing amounted to 1.4 percent of the GDP; motor vehicles and equipment were worth 1.2 percent; primary metal industries amounted to 0.5 percent; fabricated metal products accounted for 1.1 percent; petroleum and coal products were worth 0.4 percent; textile-mill products were good for 0.3 percent; and tobacco products contributed 0.2 percent.

Ninety-eight percent of American households, or 106 million, are equipped with a television set; 69.4 percent of these have cable, and there are 287 national cable channels; 91 percent have

VCRs. Each year the U.S. film industry puts out at least 500 feature movies, of which fewer than half are released to be shown on any of the 37,000 screens in the United States. Most of the rest go direct to cable or home video. Increasingly, almost everything makes its way to an ever growing international market. In 1996 international sales of entertainment and software products passed \$60 billion, bringing more money into America than any other U.S. goods. English-language films (almost all American) take in 60 to 65 percent of a global box office that in 2001 amounted to more than \$18 billion.

Two obvious points arise here. The first is that the American fascination with the products of the U.S. entertainment-celebrity complex reflects the fact that these products are the most important things America produces for sale. When we dominated the world automobile industry, we cared a lot about new car lines. Now we dominate the world celebrity business, and we care a lot about new celebrity lines. This is merely rational. The business of America is business, and the business of America is entertainment—which no one else in the world produces as we do.

The second point is that with this kind of mass, there is literally no accounting for taste. Everything the American industry makes, it makes not for "the market" but for one or another specific segment of a market that is global, growing like mad, and ever fractioning into submarkets. There is no such thing as American taste—there is the 27 percent of the population that goes to the movies at least once a month, but there is also the 30 percent that never goes to the movies. There is the under-thirty market, whose sensibilities dictate content ... But wait—this group is increasingly losing in importance to the foreign market, whose sensibilities increasingly dominate ... But wait—there is no one foreign market; there are ten major ones, and they have different tastes too. And some of them are really shockingly low. (Have you seen English tabloids lately?) America makes, the world takes—and America makes what the world wants to take. ■

Michael Kelly is the editor of *The Atlantic*.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF YASIR ARAFAT

The PLO leader is a terrible administrator but a brilliant image crafter

.....

Yasir Arafat claims that he was born in Jerusalem, but he was actually born in Cairo. He claims to belong to the prominent Jerusalem family of Husseini, but he is at best only distantly related to it. He claims that he turned down a chance to go to the University of Texas, but according to one biographer, the Palestinian-born writer Saïd K. Aburish, it is highly unlikely that he was ever accepted. He claims to have disabled ten Israeli armored personnel carriers in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, but Israel didn't even have ten APCs in the sector he was in. He claims to have made millions as a businessman in Kuwait, but this, too, is almost certainly untrue.

Obviously, Arafat is a congenital liar. But there's more to it than that: his lies are all designed to create an aura of romance around himself and the Palestinian people. Arafat is the most bizarre political leader in the world today, in that he has obliterated all considerations of ordinary living and has fused himself completely with his cause. He's never had anything like a regular home life. He has no interest in comforts, possessions, or normal pleasures. He has no interest in social issues, books, or cultural matters. Aburish says that Arafat has been to a restaurant exactly once in the past forty years. The life of total political commitment has turned him into a surpassingly strange creature, and he has a rapacious hunger to possess the Palestinian cause entirely by himself.

If you wanted to talk psychobabble, you'd blame his father. Arafat's mother died in 1933, when he was five. His father was a small-scale textile trader who spent much of his life obsessed by a tortuous and ultimately unsuccessful lawsuit to reclaim some land in Egypt that had been in his family 150 years before. He was not close to his son, and sent him as a boy to live in Jerusalem for several years with relatives. The two were soon estranged. Arafat later changed his name (his given name is

Mohammed Abdel Rahman Abdel Raouf Arafat al Qudua al Husseini). When his father died, Arafat—remarkably, in view of Arab custom—did not bother to attend the funeral.

Arafat was a poor student, but he immersed himself in politics. As a student at what is now Cairo University,

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**DAVID
BROOKS**

he was a member of both the Federation of Palestinian Students and the Egyptian Union of Students, which was supposed to be closed to Palestinians. He started a magazine called *The Voice of Palestine*, which is said to have been vitriolic and crude. At one point he filled out some initial forms to emigrate to Canada, but his life was already taken up with public speaking, lobbying, and political agitation, and he never followed through with the plan.

From the Arab defeat in the 1948 war Arafat drew the conclusion that has been at the heart of his political success ever since: Palestinians should not rely on Arab governments for help but should control the fight against Israel themselves. He has never really wavered from that conviction. He has turned down money from Arab governments whenever there were strings attached. He has vociferously clashed with Arab leaders—from Egypt's Anwar Sadat to Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Abdullah—who have tried to assume leadership of the Palestinian cause.

Arafat's first such battle was against the Palestine Liberation Organization, which was set up in 1964 by various Arab countries to coordinate Palestinian activities. Arafat regarded the group as a puppet organization and thus aligned Fatah, the movement he had started, with more-radical circles—with Algerian revolutionaries, with Che Guevara, with the Vietnamese Communists. In order to upstage the PLO, Arafat launched a series of raids into Israel. As military exercises they were fiascoes: an attempt to blow up a canal failed, and when a raiding party trying to get into Israel was intercepted by a Jordanian patrol, one

Fatah soldier was killed. But as publicity exercises they were fantastic successes, and they captured the imagination of the Palestinian people.

Sensing a threat, Arab leaders tried variously to quell or co-opt Arafat. Hafez al-Assad, at the time the Defense Minister of Syria, had him arrested in 1966 for a murder in Damascus. (It is not clear whether Arafat was even in the room when the murder took place.) Assad had him convicted and wanted him executed, but by then Arafat had a potent reputation. He was quietly released.

Arafat's go-it-alone strategy was vindicated by the crushing defeat of Arab governments in the 1967 war. Fatah did not take part in the war and thus was untouched by the disaster. Some Palestinians were so demoralized by the Arab defeat that they were willing to accept a Palestinian state made up of the West Bank and Gaza. Arafat was not. He made public appearances in the West Bank and, in spite of his Egyptian accent, succeeded in mobilizing young men displaced by the war. He soon began launching more raids against Israel. On March 21, 1968, his soldiers fought a small battle in which twenty-eight Israelis and more than a hundred Palestinians were killed. This "victory" rallied the Palestinians at a time when no one else was acting against the Israelis. Arafat, through Fatah, became the head of the PLO and has since been the undisputed leader of the Palestinian cause.

He has proved to be a mediocre guerrilla leader and a terrible administrator but a brilliant image crafter and morale builder. Early in his career he dressed in Western suits; it was at the 1956 International Students' Congress in Prague that he first publicly wore a kaffiyeh, or head scarf—a gesture that caused an immediate sensation among the Westerners in attendance. (According to Aburish, each morning Arafat would spend nearly an hour folding his kaffiyeh so that when it hung to his shoulders it resembled the map of Palestine.) The army fatigues, the pistol, and the three-day beard came later, but, like the kaffiyeh, all were carefully considered symbols. Arafat's greatest moments have always

been publicity coups—appearing on the cover of *Time* in 1968, speaking at the United Nations in 1974—rather than military victories. His primary goals have always been to create and nurture what might be called the Palestinian brand and to rally the Palestinian psyche around himself.

In 1974 a Yugoslav film crew was sent to film Arafat leading a raid against Israel. (Early in his career Arafat did take part in attacks; he is not the physical coward that some have in recent years made him out to be.) The crew waited for two days at the appointed spot on the Israeli border, but Arafat never showed up. When crew members finally tracked him down in his office, in Damascus, they complained about

south of Haifa, killed thirty-four Israelis and wounded eighty more. Israel retaliated with an attack on Palestinian bases in southern Lebanon. Arafat led the fierce Palestinian counterattack himself. The series of confrontations inflamed Arab public opinion, led to Sadat's isolation, and boosted the heroic image of Arafat and the Palestinians.

Arafat does not seem to care what sort of Palestinian state he creates—whether it is Marxist, democratic, or fundamentalist. He has no political ideology and does not seek to lead his people in any particular direction. He embodies all the ideological factions within the Palestinian population and thus is able to rally them all.

He and his army have brought dis-

crises—battles with the Jordanians, the Syrians, the Egyptians, the Lebanese Christians, and, of course, the Israelis. And each time, instead of being held even partly responsible for the widespread suffering his actions have caused his people, he has been lionized as the figure who will someday bring deliverance from that suffering. This is a monumental political achievement.

After the Oslo accords were signed, leaving Arafat in charge of administering much of the West Bank and Gaza, his armies began to prey on Palestinians, as they had on Jordanians and Lebanese years before. He would not fire those responsible—either because he doesn't like firing people or because he feared alienating certain sectors of the Palestinian populace. At the same time, he tried to control every detail of Palestinian life—insisting, for example, that he personally review individual building permits and decide whose house could have an addition. All this subverted efficient administration, and his popularity plummeted.

The immediate threat to Arafat's control during this period did not come from Arab leaders. The problem was money. Arafat was chronically short of the funds he needed to maintain his bureaucratic machine, and the problem was getting worse. Many Palestinians believe that he participated at Oslo only because, having supported Iraq in the Gulf War, he had alienated his financial backers (chiefly Saudi Arabia and some European governments) and had little choice. He was thus, they argue, forced into signing what he and most Palestinians regarded as a terrible deal. It may be that the way to isolate Arafat politically—an action that is surely necessary if a workable settlement is ever to be reached in the Middle East—is not to attack him head-on, providing him with yet another of the near-death experiences that seem only to recharge him. The solution may instead be to choke off his money supply—the one thing that props up his authority in times of calm. ▀

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having wasted their time. Arafat offered to stage a mock offensive for them on the spot. He had his aides rush in as if in the heat of battle, while he shouted fake orders and pointed furiously at maps. It was a brilliant performance, much appreciated by the film crew, and the director congratulated Arafat on his acting skills.

When Arab leaders have tried to wrest control of the Palestinian struggle, Arafat has struck back. In the winter of 1977–1978 Anwar Sadat addressed the Israeli parliament and began peace talks with Israel. Arafat responded on March 11, when an eleven-man Fatah hit squad, after landing their boats just

order wherever they have settled. In 1969 they based themselves in Jordan, where they soon began terrorizing the local people, running extortion rackets against businesses, and undermining the Jordanian regime. Black September followed in 1970: Jordan's King Hussein launched a huge and bloody war against the Palestinians, killing thousands and leading to the expulsion of Arafat and his army. The same sort of thing happened in Lebanon a decade later, with Palestinian thugs looting banks and destroying the local government. The Syrians finally came in to restore order, in what became known as Black June. Arafat has somehow survived his many

FIREBOMBS OVER TOKYO

America's 1945 attack on Japan's capital remains undeservedly obscure alongside Hiroshima and Nagasaki

.....

In 1990, when I was traveling in Japan, my friend Masayuki introduced me to his mother, Mrs. Tadokoro. One night, as the three of us sat together after dinner in her apartment in Osaka, she told me of the firebombing of Tokyo. She was nineteen when the American bombers came, just after midnight on March 10, 1945. Hearing the air-raid sirens, she ran to Kinshi Park. As she ran, she saw an electrical pole glow hot in the flames and then crash down. In the park many people, most with suitcases, waited through the night as sixteen square miles of the city burned. Nothing remained of her house the next morning but some stones. Still, she was lucky. The dead from that one night's bombing numbered 80,000 to 100,000—more than later died in Nagasaki (70,000 to 80,000), and more than half the number who died in Hiroshima (120,000 to 150,000).

August brings the fifty-seventh anniversary of the two famous atomic bombings, justification for which is still a matter of debate. The conventional wisdom that the Hiroshima bomb saved 500,000 or a million American lives is wrong; according to the historian Gar Alperovitz, modern scholarship and also government estimates at the time put likely U.S. casualties from an invasion of Japan, had one been necessary, in the range of 20,000 to 50,000—which is, of course, still a lot. Nor is it the case that Hiroshima was targeted for its military installations; it had some modest military value but was targeted mainly for psychological effect. Yet the bombing clearly did hasten Japan's surrender, and thus saved many American lives (and possibly, on balance, Japanese lives). The much harder question is why the United States rushed—and it did rush—to bomb Nagasaki only three days later. Neither President Harry Truman nor anyone since has provided a compelling answer. In his 1988 history of the nuclear age, McGeorge Bundy, who served as National Security Advisor to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, wrote, "Hiro-

shima alone was enough to bring the Russians in; these two events together brought the crucial imperial decision for surrender, just *before* the second bomb was dropped."

Alongside the two atomic bombings, the firebombing of Tokyo remains obscure. Few Americans have even heard of it, and few Japanese like to dwell on it. When I listened to Mrs. Tadokoro's account, I was struck by her matter-of-fact, detached manner. What happened happened, and war is always bad, and 1945 is ancient history: that was her practical, forward-looking attitude, and I admired her for it. Yet the Tokyo attack deserves the most introspection of all, even as it receives the least.

In the 1930s, as today, Americans set great store by the principle that civilian populations should not be targeted for bombing. "Inhuman barbarism," President Roosevelt called civilian bombing in 1939. Indeed, that was one reason to fight the Japanese: they targeted civilians, we didn't. By 1945, however, the precision bombing of Japan had proved frustrating. "This outfit has been getting a lot of publicity without having really accomplished a hell of a lot in bombing results," Major General Curtis LeMay grouched on March 6. So he loaded more than 300 B-29 Superfortress bombers with napalm incendiaries and, on the evening of March 9, ordered them emptied over central Tokyo. LeMay made no attempt to focus on military targets, nor could he have done so with napalm, whose effect that windy night was to burn wooden Japanese dwellings with spectacular efficiency. The victims were "scorched and boiled and baked to death," LeMay later said. Over the next few months the United States dealt with more than sixty smaller Japanese cities in like fashion.

The rationale was that Japan's industrial capability needed to be destroyed and the country's will broken. In fact, however, the Japanese maintained the ability to fight, although they probably

lost the capacity to mount any large offensive. In any case, even supposing that the Tokyo firebombing was a success on its own terms, did that justify the targeting of tens of thousands of civilians, with weapons designed to melt them in their homes? If so, what sort of action would *not* have been justified on grounds of helping to end the war (that is, winning)? In June of 1945, as the historian John W. Dower notes, a military aide to General Douglas MacArthur described the American firebombing campaign as "one of the most ruthless and barbaric killings of non-combatants in all history." It is hard to disagree.

I believe the firebombing of Tokyo should be considered a war crime, a terror bombing, if those terms are to have any meaning at all. It is true that the United States in 1945, in marked and important contrast with, say, al Qaeda in 2001, viewed the targeting of civilians as a last rather than a first resort; and it is true that throughout history even the virtuous have wound up fighting dirty if fighting clean failed; and it is true that sometimes the good must do terrible things to destroy a great evil. But it is also true that if the good find themselves driven to barbarism, they own up afterward and search their souls.

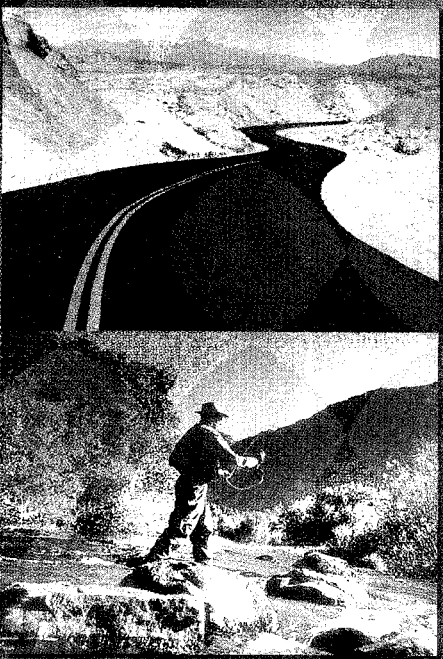
America is better at reforming than at repenting, which is probably just as well. Perhaps America's quiet way of paying its debt to the dead of Tokyo has been to take unprecedented pains, far beyond anything done by any other great power, to design and deploy weapons and tactics that spare civilian lives. A lot of innocent people in Yugoslavia and Afghanistan are alive today as a result. Still, the erasure of the Tokyo firebombing from Americans' collective memory is not a noble thing.

In March, on the fifty-seventh otherwise unmarked anniversary of the attack on Tokyo, a handful of survivors opened a small museum there to memorialize the firebombing. They used private contributions totaling \$800,000, which is less than one percent of what Mount Vernon plans to spend on its new museum and visitors' center. Well, it was a start. The next step should be an official museum or memorial—not in Tokyo but in Washington. ■

Jonathan Rauch is a correspondent for The Atlantic and a senior writer and columnist for National Journal.

COMMENT
**JONATHAN
RAUCH**

OUTBACK



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ARE SMOOTH,
YOU SHOULD FEEL
ITS CURVES.

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TRUE CONFESSIONS

Two simple measures could go a long way toward ensuring that findings of criminal guilt are genuine

.....

Seventy years ago, in a book called *Convicting the Innocent*, the Yale Law School professor Edwin Borchard produced a classic study of how the wrong person gets sent to prison or to death. The hapless innocents Borchard profiled included a coal miner and a doctor, Central European immigrants and American blacks, an unemployed religious visionary and an Algerian John named Frenchy. In those days exoneration was almost always a matter of luck—occasionally, for example, a supposed murder victim would turn up “hale and hearty” sometime after the alleged murderer landed in the penitentiary. Today, thanks to DNA evidence (when it is available), wrongful convictions can be reversed more confidently than ever before. And that confidence allows us to analyze the reasons for such convictions with greater certainty than Borchard or his contemporaries could.

Yet what is striking about the death-penalty convictions overturned recently (a hundred have been reversed in the past thirty years) and about other cases in which DNA evidence belatedly showed the accused to be innocent is how clearly the convictions rested on the same flawed foundations that Borchard identified. As in Borchard’s day, what tends to do in the wrongly convicted is the kind of evidence that seems clinching, that often *is* clinching—namely, eyewitness identifications and confessions. But the human memory is not a video recorder; eyewitness testimony is notoriously flawed. And although most of those who confess are guilty, people can and do confess to crimes they did not commit—sometimes because they are coerced; sometimes (more often) because they are bewildered, frightened, or exhausted; sometimes because they are children, or adults with the mental capacity of children; sometimes because their interrogators have presented them with plausible scenarios in which they might have committed the crimes unknowingly—while blacked out, for instance, or while in the grip of another personality.

COMMENT
**MARGARET
TALBOT**

Children in interrogation rooms will sometimes confess to crimes they did not commit on the assumptions that they will then be allowed to go home, that they are doing what an adult wants of them, and that they can tell their parents the truth and fix everything later. Remember the two boys, aged seven and eight, who falsely confessed to killing eleven-year-old Ryan Harris in Chicago four years ago? The detectives who interrogated them, without their parents present, are said to have served one of the boys a Happy Meal and held his hands, saying, “We are all friends.” The mentally retarded, too, will sometimes falsely confess, and for the same sorts of reasons: eagerness to please, naiveté about the legal weight of a confession, a yearning to be back home or to see their mothers. Jerry Frank Townsend, a twenty-seven-year-old retarded man, admitted in 1979 to six murders and a rape and served twenty-two years in a Florida prison before DNA evidence helped to clear him, last year. Charlie King, a retarded seventeen-year-old who was working as a school janitor, went to jail in 1992 for a crime he did not commit but did confess to—the murder of a nine-year-old girl in East Saint Louis—while the real killer went on to murder two more girls. “Even without the use of formal third-degree methods,” as Borchard put it, “the influence of a stronger mind upon a weaker often produces, by persuasion or suggestion, the desired result.”

Even able-minded adults, subjected to the right combination of coercion, sleeplessness, and grief, can falsely confess. In 1999 Keith Longtin, a forty-four-year-old welder from suburban Maryland, whose case was documented in a *Washington Post* series last year, allegedly made self-incriminating statements to the police about his wife’s murder. Longtin had been held for thirty-eight hours of questioning, during which he slept, the police log says, for a total of fifty minutes. (While he served eight

months in prison, the real killer, whose identity was later established by DNA evidence, sexually assaulted five women at knifepoint, one in front of her young child.) In 1988 Christopher Ochoa confessed to raping and murdering a young woman in Austin, Texas; he was later definitively cleared. Now that Ochoa is out of prison, he says that it’s hard to explain to people who have never been in his position why he confessed. In interviews and speeches he offers some variation on the following themes: he was terrified, he was only twenty-two years old and had never been in trouble with the law, his interrogation lasted twelve hours, and the detectives in charge showed him autopsy photos of the murdered girl and threatened him with the death penalty.

A 1996 Justice Department report titled *Convicted by Juries, Exonerated by Science* detailed twenty-eight cases of wrongful conviction. Eyewitness identifications, usually by the victims, were the decisive factor in most of them. Like a confession, the testimony of an eyewitness, particularly a victim, is powerful stuff, sometimes seen as the gold standard of evidence. But in fact—as shown by a generation’s worth of careful research on memory and suggestibility by psychologists including Elizabeth Loftus and Gary Wells—eyewitness accounts can be fragmented and changeable and subject to the deep desire to see somebody, anybody, punished for a terrible crime.

Experts have come up with two very good ideas for making wrongful convictions less likely. One is to improve the standard police lineup by letting witnesses see only one purported suspect at a time, so that they can make an absolute judgment about each one. When witnesses see six people at once, they make relative judgments, comparing the six and picking whoever looks most like the person they remember from the crime scene, rather than evaluating each individually. Conducting lineups sequentially seems like a minor change, but research by Wells and others has shown that it reduces the number of mistaken identifications—by as much as one half—without significantly reducing the number of correct ones. Ensuring that the detective running the lineup does not

know who the real suspect is, and so does not make leading comments (Don't you want to look at number three again?), helps too, for the same reason that good clinical research is double-blind: otherwise it's easy to contaminate the results with intentional or unintentional bias.

The second proposal is to videotape all police interrogations, so that a reliable record exists of the questioning that produced a confession—how leading, how coercive, how open-ended—and of the suspect's comportment during it. Many police departments around the country, including those of San Diego and Kansas City, Missouri, already do this voluntarily, and police departments in Minnesota and Alaska are required by law to do it. Videotaping makes some police officers who haven't used it a little nervous. They worry that it will cost too much, that curbside or squad-car confessions will be inadmissible because taping hasn't started yet, or that officers will feel constrained from using aggressive but legitimate interrogation techniques—for example, telling a suspect they have evidence that they don't, a method the Supreme Court has upheld and Andy Sipowicz uses all the time on *NYPD Blue*.

These objections are largely unfounded. Videotaping is cheap: cameras cost a few hundred dollars, and whatever expense a police department incurs in videotaping is considerably less than the multimillion-dollar awards some states have paid for wrongful convictions. It is also ubiquitous, both in law enforcement (ever gotten one of those traffic tickets with a surveillance photo of your car?) and in everyday life. Indeed, in the era of amateur videos, Court TV, and twenty-four-hour-a-day news coverage, we have come to expect a video record of almost anything that matters to law or to history, and plenty of things that don't. Laws can be written to include good-faith exemptions for confessions obtained off-camera—and besides, some police officers already have video cameras mounted on their dashboards and carry tape recorders into the field, to protect themselves against allegations of abuse.

Judges are capable of reaching sound conclusions about what constitutes a tough but legal line of questioning and what goes too far, and by now jurors have seen enough cop shows not to be shocked by scurrilous language or manipulative nice-guy tactics or certain kinds of allowable deception. "For me, the real issue is not whether the police are pushing the envelope a little bit in questioning but whether they are leading someone to produce a story that squares with a preconceived theory," says Steven Drizin, a law professor at Northwestern University and an advocate of taping. "That crosses the line, and it's go-



ing to be right there on the tape whether the confession originated in the mind of the police officer or of the defendant."

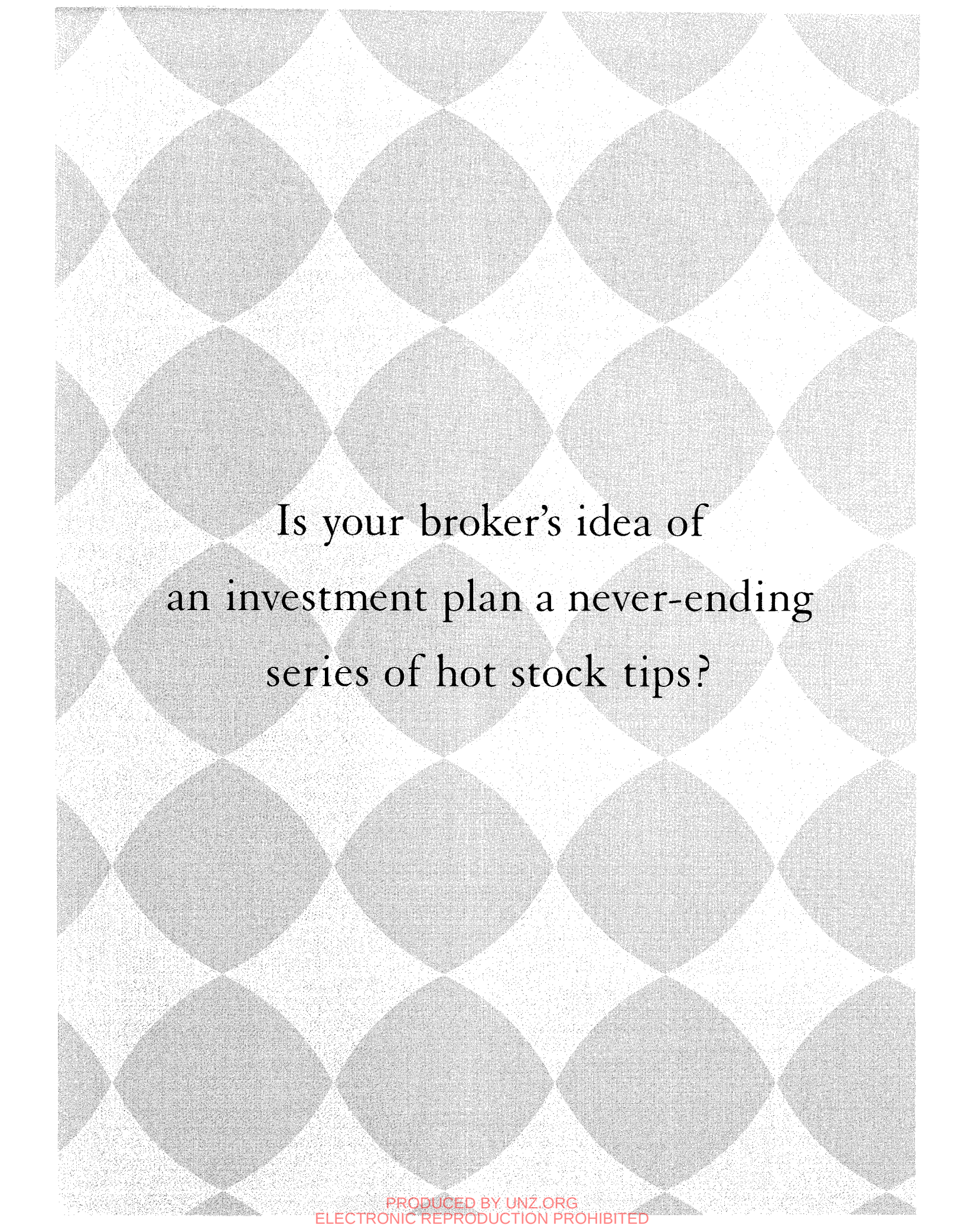
Whenever prosecutors in Hennepin County, Minnesota, use an interrogation tape that shows officers resorting to what might look like unorthodox methods, they have the officers take the stand and explain that their actions are accepted law-enforcement techniques. "Jurors understand," says Amy Klobuchar, the county attorney. "And you have to balance the risk with the great advantage to the prosecution of having jurors be able to see a person confessing on videotape and see his demeanor right after the crime, which may be a lot different from his cleaned-up appearance in court." Sometimes, she adds, there are advantages she would never have imagined:

"My favorite story is of the time when we had a suspect who claimed to be blind. The police left the interrogation room for a few minutes, and the videotape caught him picking up a paper and starting to read it" (A recent editorial in the *Chicago Tribune* noted a similar case in Kankakee County, Illinois, where the videotaping of interrogations is routine. A suspect who had repeatedly denied that he had killed a young woman was left alone in the room for a few minutes, during which he seemed to forget about the video camera and began singing, "Ding, dong, the wicked witch is dead ...")

Despite some initial reluctance, police officers and prosecutors in the places where videotaping is already standard practice now tend to support it just as much as do advocates for the wrongfully convicted. According to a 1993 Justice Department study of police videotaping, the most thorough research to date on the subject, 97 percent of the departments that taped reported that it was "very useful" or "somewhat useful." The study found that videotaping increased the number of convictions and guilty pleas and decreased allegations of police misconduct. Moreover, when such allegations are made, videotapes can prove or disprove them to almost everybody's satisfaction. One police officer quoted in the study said that he likes videotaping because it builds trust in the police among judges and juries—they can "see into the interrogation room" and "see the professionalism of the interrogators."

Videotaping is one of those rare innovations that can help either side in the criminal-justice system, for the simple reason that it serves the quest to find out what really happened—which is to say (without sounding too grandiose about it) the quest for the truth. That, in the end, is its real virtue. "To me, videotaping is in the same category as DNA evidence," says William Geller, the author of the 1993 Justice Department study and currently a consultant to police departments. "It will send some people away for a long time to places they don't want to go, and it will free other people. It's a powerful truth-finding tool." ■

Margaret Talbot is a senior fellow at the New America Foundation and a contributing writer at The New York Times Magazine.



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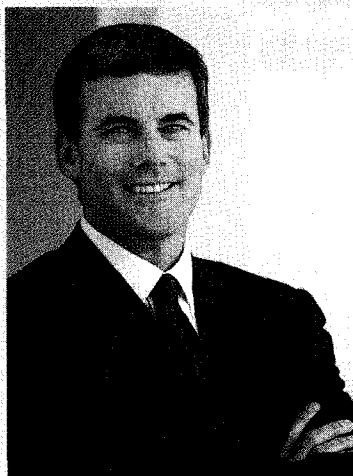
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POSTMODERN PROTEST IN THE AGE OF THE NEO-DEMO

*"I'll keep the mohawk until we stop killing people abroad."
—the musician Eddie Vedder, quoted about his hair
in Rolling Stone, April 11, 2002*

.....

The Palestinian Solidarity March had almost all the elements of a classic modern American political demonstration. On April 20, in Washington, D.C., a constituency previously not heard from (or not listened to) turned out in impressive numbers. Its representatives looked respectable. They conducted themselves with dignity. They had a grievance. The only thing missing was an intelligible demand.

The marchers wanted the people of the United States to ... do what? Abandon one of our few allies and take up the cause of Arab regimes that hate us? And when an Arab regime, such as Saudi Arabia's, does profess friendship, it is the Eddie Haskell to our Wally Cleaver. Should we, as more than a few placards suggested, GET OUT OF THE MIDDLE EAST? Then the front-line Arab states could have a free hand with Israel and recapture the glories of 1949, 1956, 1967, 1973, and 1982. Are we supposed to invade the region and sort things out? We did that in 1991. Support a Palestinian state? We have, in 1947 and right now. Maybe we'd better keep applying combinations of aid incentives and diplomatic pressure, carrots and sticks, shredding twigs into the Middle Eastern salad and whacking people on the knuckles with raw vegetables. Let's mount a demonstration supporting current policies: the Million Muddlers-through March, with the masses chanting, "Five, Four, Three, Two/We Don't Have a Doggone Clue!"

Israel stubbornly insists on existing. The foolish, despotic, and corrupt governments of the Arab countries stubbornly insist on various alternatives. The political and economic situation in Arab lands is so bad that it seems as if the only sensible thing for an Arab to do is to get out and go someplace with freedom and opportunities. The people in the Palestinian Solidarity March have done so. Now they're a successful immigrant group

exercising political power—exercising it to denounce Zionists, a successful immigrant group exercising political power.

We are in the postmodern era of American political demonstrations. The Palestinian Solidarity March, an indignant crowd opposed, in a way, to itself, was marching around with little hope of achieving an objective—assuming there was one. This struck a chord.

Thousands of other protesters joined in. They held a neo-demo, parodying the actions of the suffragettes, Cox's Army, the civil-rights movement, and the Vietnam War protests. Seeking a clear political response has been replaced by consulting a Magic 8-Ball of activist demands: "Reply Hazy, Demonstrate Again Later."

There were, in fact, three additional pointless marches in Washington on April 20. The Colombia Mobilization Festival of Hope and Resistance gathered at the Washington Monument. U.S. drug-eradication policy was opposed. Millions of Americans have opposed that policy more effectively with mirrors, razor blades, and little glass pipes. The Colombia Mobilization also wanted the U.S. Army School of the Americas eliminated, although it has been and is now the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation. This can no longer be called a training ground for Latin American dictators, because Castro is the only dictator left. And to judge by the number of Che T-shirts in the crowd, the Colombia Mobilization is on Cuba's side.

Then there was the Mobilization for Global Justice, gathered in front of World Bank headquarters. The Mobilization was claiming that World Bank development policies are all wrong. A little late. One of the World Bank's own economists, William Easterly, has published a book, *The Elusive Quest for Growth* (2001), claiming that World Bank development policies are all wrong.

And on the Ellipse, behind the White

House, the U.S. war on terrorism and Israel's West Bank incursions were being denounced by ANSWER. Act Now to Stop War and End Racism is a group that awes any fan of acronyms. I was distracted from covering their event by an urge to scribble in my reporter's notebook, trying for a one-up: Quotidian Undergraduates Eagerly Supporting Terrorist Internment On Neptune.

The Palestinian Solidarity March began on Connecticut Avenue, at the Washington Hilton, where the somewhat acronym-impaired AIPAC, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, was holding a conference. Many of the Arab-Americans arrived in family groups. Mothers and daughters were modestly garbed. Men wore crisp sport shirts and creased trousers. The other protesters, not all of them young, came dressed as young protesters. Covering of hair mingled with exposing of midriff. I didn't see anyone doing both, but a number of non-Arab marchers had kaffiyehs inexpertly plopped on their heads. A middle-aged man who was obviously not a Pakistani sported a *shalwar kameez* and walked down Connecticut eating from a box of Wheatette crackers.

According to *The Washington Post* for Sunday, April 21, "Organizers at the march privately urged participants to strike swastikas from their posters." They didn't comply. But many of the protest signs had the swastikas turned backward, perhaps in an effort to soften the Nazi reference:卐 = SHARON =卐. Thus some placards could be construed to mean "American Indian decorative motif = Prime Minister of Israel = Hindu good-luck charm." Jews were in the crowd. JEWS FOR PEACE, read one sign. JEWS SAY NO TO ISRAELI STATE TERROR, read another. A chant went up nearby: "Two, four, six, eight, Israel is a racist state." Diverse advocacies mixed in the crowd: THE RICH MUST SHARE, DOWN WITH CORPORATE CAPITALISM, DESTROY ALL BORDERS, and a giant cardboard turtle labeled MOBILIZE. Everyone got along fine. A young man carried a crude birch-bark mock-up of a television, captioned "How much of your life is lived through a screen?" Another young man, a representative of something called the Independent Media

Center, pedaled through the march on a bicycle equipped with a homemade duct-tape-and-PVC-pipe rig that held a video camera. Messages ranged from the disprovable ("We Are All Palestinians") to the dumbfoundingly true ("Trees Are Not Terrorists"—although the day before in Washington a tree had blown over in a thunderstorm and killed a passenger in a van).

Some messages conveyed no sense: GIVE ME FREEDOM OR GIVE ME PALESTINE. Some conveyed too much: PRO PALESTINIAN AND PRO ISRAELI HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES. Some messages were open to interpretation. A young woman carried a picture of herself smiling broadly and embracing a large, happy mutt. Written beneath was "My dog has more rights than Palestinians."

Relations between the police and protesters were cordial. When the march reached the Connecticut Avenue tunnel under Dupont Circle, some of the marchers balked at entering, not without reason. The ventilation shafts rising from the underpass into the park were unguarded stink-bomb invitations. Washington Police Chief Charles Ramsey stepped in and led the way through.

The Solidarity March went down Eighteenth Street to the World Bank headquarters, where it was greeted with cheers and shouts of "Free, Free Palestine!" There was pogo dancing at the Global Justice rally, and bare feet, and dissonant beating of drums, pots, and empty five-gallon plastic buckets. The effect was *Riverdance* if Ireland had been conquered by Berkeley instead of England. A baby carriage without a baby was pushed around with bongos and tambourines bungee-corded onto it and a sign reading RHYTHM WORKERS UNION. A couple was parading on stilts carrying GROW posters. The man's beard was braided. An American flag was burned, and so was a flag with yellow, blue, and red stripes. I asked what flag it was. No one seemed to know. "Colombia?" someone said. Two women in their twenties, festooned with buttons and stickers for various causes, ran toward the demonstrations holding hands and uttering squeals of gleeful anticipation.

I wasn't getting much information from the demonstrators. I have reached the stage in life where there's nothing I can do to keep from looking like a fifty-four-year-old man who should mind his own business. I had brought along Max Pappas, who does research work for me. Max, at twenty-six and with a couple of days' stubble, can pass for an activist of some kind. Although, personally, I thought the cloth cap and olive-drab short-sleeved sport shirt that Max had selected, to blend in, made him look like a sports-car enthusiast on the way to bowling league. Max spotted a pack of bouncy coeds in yellow

students, a young woman with a tape recorder thrust a microphone in my face. She had a black hankie tied across her nose. I suppose she didn't mean this as a parody of the veil worn in the Gulf States. "Why are you at this protest?" she said, in a necessarily muffled voice.

"I'm a reporter," I said. She backed away.

Max talked to a man who was carrying a placard showing rainbow stripes, a peace sign, and a suggestion to "Envision a World." He was walking a tiny Pomeranian that did or did not have more rights than Palestinians.



MOVEMENT T-shirts and immediately went to interview them. They were from Colby College, and the purpose of their organization was to go to lots of demonstrations. "If anyone has an idea," one of them said, "you just come to the group and everyone will support you."

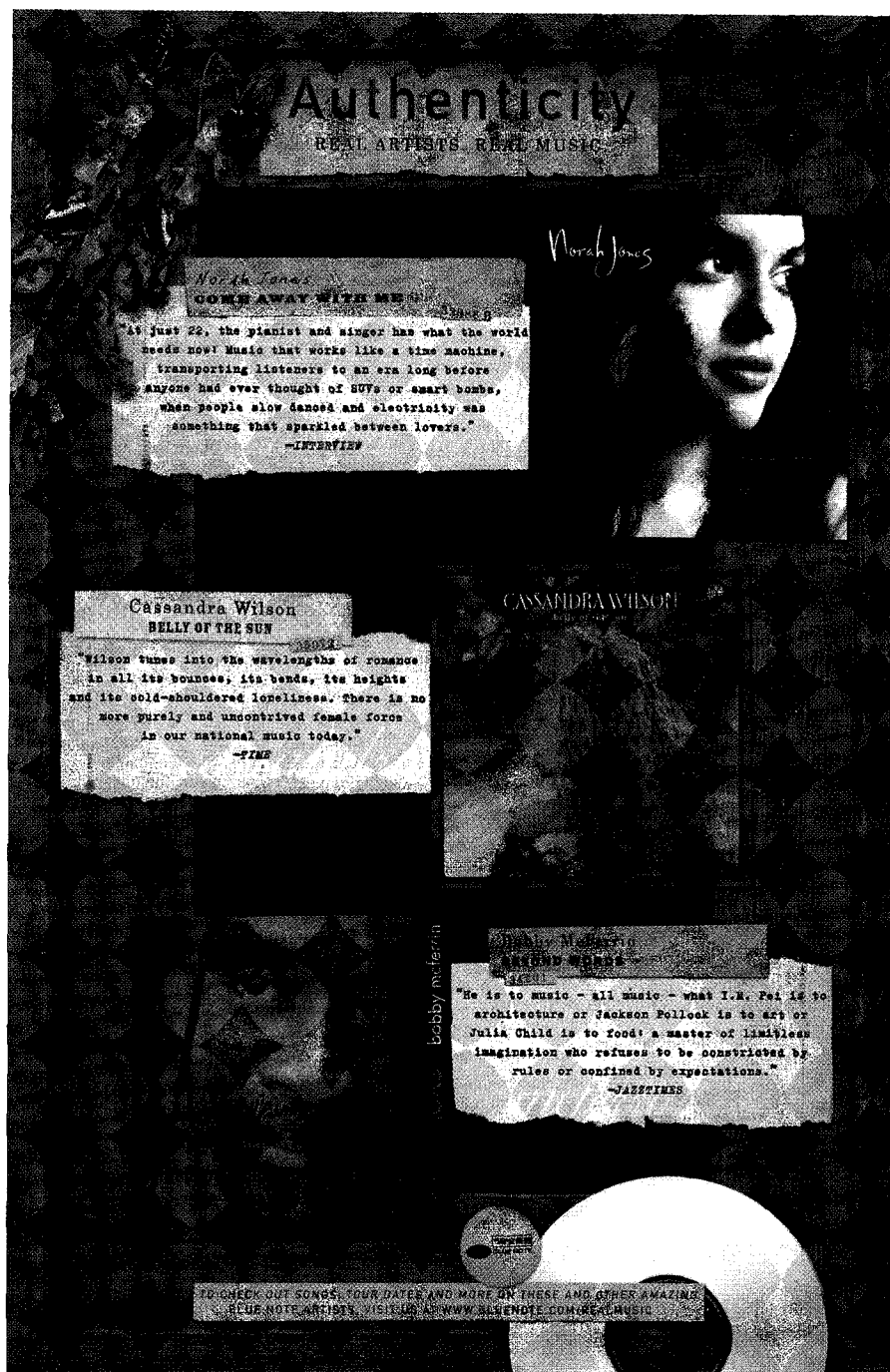
Other collegians had an even more supportive environment. An item in the Sunday *Washington Post* noted,

Students from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Milwaukee Area Technical College said their schools paid most of their expenses because they belong to a campus group, Students Peace Action Network. The schools provided vans for the trip and paid for hotels.

While Max was talking to the Colby

"Yeah, man," said the man, who appeared to be over forty, "when I get older I want to join Greenpeace."

A fifteen-foot-wide balloon had been erected by the Rainforest Action Network. The balloon was decorated like a globe with a FOR SALE banner across it, but it was shaped like a small-town water tower or, maybe, a mushroom cloud. On one side of the balloon someone was speaking to not many people in Spanish while a young priest with blond streaks in his hair and wearing a fashion-forward sport coat got ready to take the mike. On the other side of the balloon there was a protest against Citibank, whose Washington office is catercorner to the World Bank. A speaker asked Citibank to "finance



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solar mortgages." The small group of listeners chanted—though not, I gathered, in response to the speaker's request—"Hey, Citi, not with my money."

Max found campus feminists to interview. One admitted that the Taliban's treatment of women was terrible and said the United States should have done something earlier, "in the name of women."

"Wouldn't that involve war?" Max asked.

"Yeah, it's a tricky one," the feminist said. "There might be some nonviolent approach such as micro-lending."

A man stood inside an enormous, ill-made papier-mâché head of George Bush. The head did not bear a label. A bad portrait of George W. seemed to be the point. Other points being made in front of the World Bank: MORE WORLD/LESS BANK, PEACE THROUGH PEACEFUL MEANS, FUCK YOU CIA, NO MORE BHOPALS, REFUSE WAR/CHALLENGE DEMOCRACY, WE ARE ALL PALESTINIANS (on cartoons of Tibetan monks being beaten by Chinese soldiers and Vietnamese peasants being beaten by GIs), KEEP INDIA SECULAR, WE ARE COMPLICIT, and STOP THE COMMODIFICATION OF WATER (in a crowd where almost everyone was carrying a brand-name bottle of same). There was also a placard reading SUFFERING for AFRICAN PEOPLE, which critiqued the IMF's "structural adjustment programs" and indicated that both protestor and protestee were in dire need of acronym consultation.

The Mobilization for Global Justice smelled of cats and patchouli oil and body odor. It joined with the Palestinian Solidarity March, and everyone moved in ragtag order along H Street and down Thirteenth to Freedom Plaza, on the far side of the White House.

Counterdemonstrators were few. A Dockers-dressed mom and dad stood on H Street with their ten-year-old son. They held signs: GO BUSH and USA ♥ IT OR LEAVE IT. A few college-age protesters came out of the march to argue, not with the parents, just with their child.

Some of the marchers—though none of the Arab-Americans—affected threatening attitudes. Their faces were

masked. Their body language was angry. They shouted. But they didn't do anything. Several hirsute and not very clean young people wore bicycle helmets and MEDIC armbands. They hopped around nervously, giving, perhaps, a preview of some future socialized medicine. A kid waved an American flag that had corporate logos instead of stars on the blue field. He was wearing Adidas shoes, a Swiss Army watch, and a Mountainsmith backpack. Four of the Palestinian Solidarity marchers carried a makeshift litter bearing a girl wrapped up and pretending to be injured or dead. The day was growing muggy, and the girl's companions sprinkled Evian on her face. A tourist bus got caught up in the march at Thirteenth and New York Avenue. Someone bobbed around in the crowd wearing an enormous gold-fringed Trojan helmet. The fur hats of a group of Hassidim were almost as large. I tried to talk to them, but I couldn't get through a coterie bearing USA/ISRAEL AXIS OF RACISM/WHITE SUPREMACY signs. I must rely on my reportorial betters at *The Washington Post*:

"The Palestinians here in the crowd look at us mistrustfully at first," said Rabbi Yisroel Weiss, 45, of New York. "But then they speak a few words with us, and they show us respect and friendship." ... He said his group favored dismantling Israel and returning it to the Palestinians.

A sign reading PRO-PALESTINIAN IS NOT ANTI-SEMITIC was carried next to a sign reading SHARON MAKES HITLER PROUD. A delegation of Iranian women in chadors was preceded by a delegation announcing LESBIAN, GAY, BI & TRANS PEOPLE SAY STOP THE WAR. One of the LGBTP was wearing, with panache, a Palestinian flag as a cape. A middle-aged Arab-American man sipped from a Starbucks cup. A college student held a placard: STARBUCKS SUCKS. Enlarged wire-service photos of Palestinian casualties were held aloft, as were THE MEDIA LIES posters. One banner stated, CANNABIS SMOKERS ARE NOT CRIMINALS. A woman ran through the march with a dollar bill dangling from the brim of her baseball cap. Her T-shirt said, IN PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS.

At the edge of Freedom Plaza a young couple had brought their baby in a stroller and several sheets of cardboard decorated with crossed American and Israeli flags, and slogans: SUPPORT ISRAEL and U.S. AND ISRAEL, BROTHERS UNITED.

"You can't just do nothing," the husband said. Arab-Americans politely ignored them. The rest of the protesters steered away. The only tension on April 20 came from excessive support.

A dozen members of the New Black Panther Party marched (in the military sense) into Freedom Plaza. They were dressed in black fatigues, black motorcycle helmets, and combat boots. They scowled and did drill maneuvers, about-facing and attentioning. The New Black Panthers carried pictures of Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. Their picket signs were professionally printed: THE STATE OF ISRAEL HAS NO RIGHT TO EXIST, THE AMERICAN/ISRAELI WHITE MAN IS THE DEVIL, JIHAD. They hollered, "Death to Israel," "Holy war, holy war, holy war," and "Kill every Zionist in Palestine."

For a moment the other demonstrators were silent. They fidgeted. They backed away. "Excuse me, I'm so sorry," said a courteous Arab-American teenager who stepped on my foot. Then a chant began in the crowd: "Killing is not the answer, Killing is not the answer." The chant grew louder. Demonstrators raised their fingers in peace signs and began to press in on the New Black Panther Party. Cacophonous drumming came from the Global Justice mobilizers. They shouted, "No more hate!" A woman about my age began screaming into a bullhorn: "Jews and Arabs unite!" The New Black Panther Party, with somewhat less military élan than before, marched away.

(As it happened, the old Black Panther Party was holding its thirty-fifth reunion that weekend, at the University of the District of Columbia. The former chairman of the party, Bobby Seale, attended. "I like the methodical way it was done," he was quoted as saying about the war in Afghanistan. "That's how you judge the operation when you're

dealing with a bunch of terrorists such as they are.")

The crowd in Freedom Plaza grew and pressed against the front of the National Theatre. Emerging patrons were trapped beneath the marquee. A pair of older women stood patiently staring at the protesters. "I gather you're not part of the demonstration," I said.

"No," one woman said, "we came to see a matinee of *Mamma Mia*!"

"But all of America is part of this turmoil," the other woman said.

"How are you going to get out of here?" I asked.

"We'll just go back in," the first woman said, "and see another show."

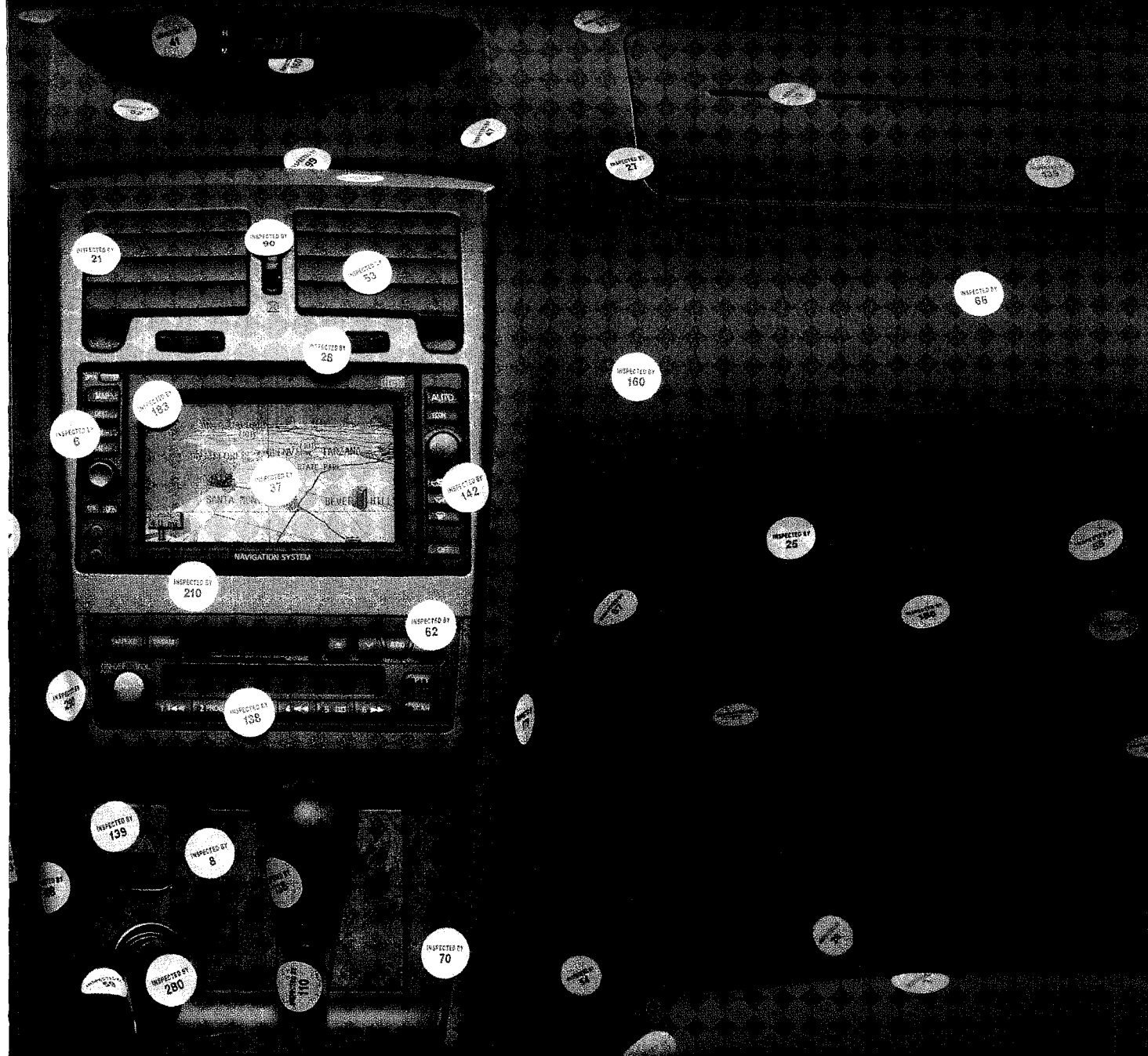
The Colombia Mobilization joined the ANSWER rally on the Ellipse, and thousands more protesters pushed toward Freedom Plaza. They looked familiar. If I took off my bifocals, they could have been the same denimed and T-shirted, funny-coifed, oddly shod, beard-attempting kids with whom I'd protested at this very place a generation ago. It was a startling continuity in youthful fashion—as if I'd arrived at an anti-Vietnam War teach-in and found my friends wearing zoot suits. One thing, however, has changed in thirty-five years. Regular folks feel no desire to kick these young folks for the way they look. The kids are so thoroughly tattooed and body-pierced that whatever pain someone might want to inflict on them they've already inflicted on themselves.

One bunch began a skit involving a boy in a Halloween skull mask spraying an aerosol can at girls carrying primitive paintings that depicted agricultural endeavors. Then they all dropped dead and yelled something about Colombia.

The marchers trampled the grass on the Ellipse. MORE GARDENS, a sign read. Other posters and banners declared, GIVE COMMUNISM A CHANCE, PEACE IS PATRIOTIC, END ASHCROFT'S POLICE STATE, REPUBLICANS FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE FOR ALL, STOP CALLING PALESTINIANS TERRORISTS, REAL PROFITS FROM PEACE, CORPORATIONS ARE KILLING THE WORLD, THE U.S. STARTED IT ALL, DOWN WITH ALGERIAN FASCIST REGIME, PEACE TREATY IN KOREA, LEAVE CHAVEZ ALONE, and FOCUS YOUR DISCONTENT. Indeed.

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Many of the signs were wordy: AIDS TREATMENT NOW/COKE'S NEGLECT = DEATH FOR WORKERS IN AFRICA. Another began, BUSH'S POX AMERICANA MADE US THE AXIS OF IGNORANCE & A GLOBAL STUPID POWER. THANKS DUBYA ... and continued in that vein. Some signs were touchingly simple: PLEASE STOP KILLING EVERYBODY. Others had an air of hopelessness: THE ONLY WEAPON A "TERRORIST" NEEDS IS PURPOSE. THEIR PURPOSE GROWS WITH EACH DAY OF THE WAR ON TERROR. One sign was just a mistake: COLIATH LOST. David, after all, was an Israeli. The middle-aged "Vermonters for Peace" looked like they gave themselves their own haircuts.

A young lady handed me a square of posterboard washed in pink watercolor with a brighter pink star painted on it and PEACE painstakingly lettered across the front. A family displayed a photograph of Afghan women, labeled "Our Afghan Sister Family." They gave me a printed handout stating that the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan had "condemned the U.S.-backed Northern Alliance for a 'record of human rights violations as bad as that of the Taliban's.'" The handout ended with the sad and deflated sentence "This statement has apparently been ignored by George Bush and his associates."

A young man wore a T-shirt saying, I USED TO BE A WHITE AMERICAN BUT I GAVE IT UP IN THE INTEREST OF HUMANITY. But another demonstrator wore one of those Abercrombie & Fitch T-shirts that were withdrawn from stores following accusations of racial insensitivity. A fat, slant-eyed bodhisattva appeared above the slogan "Get Your Buddha on the Floor." Nearby was a banner from the Buddhist Peace Fellowship.

The four rallies had now joined together, a total of about 75,000 people. They trooped down Pennsylvania Avenue toward the Mall with the Palestinian Solidarity marchers in the lead. Many young Arab-American women had cell phones pressed to their head scarves and were saying things like "You wouldn't believe it, I'm right here on the Mall." Scores of Palestinian flags,

and a variety of flags from other Arab nations, were being waved.

"What's *that* flag?" asked another young woman being interviewed by Max. "Lebanon," Max said.

"But why are they waving a flag from *Lebanon*?" she said.

In among the Arab-American families—some of whom had brought coolers and lawn chairs—were college students with a sign reading IF QUEER SOLDIERS UNDERMINE THE MILITARY, SIGN US UP. An exhausted-looking teenager wearing anarchist symbols sat on a curb with a piece of cardboard on which he had lettered BURN ME I'M OLD AND I GET IN THE WAY. Appearing, without intended irony, near the scores of charter buses that had been hired by the demonstrators was VISUALIZE FUEL-EFFICIENT VEHICLES/IT'S A NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE. Some placards were strangely verbless: HEMP. and INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT. I sent Max to find out why someone was holding up a swath of hot-pink synthetic-mohair cloth. "It's a rallying point for Wesleyan students," said a Wesleyan student in a DEVIANT QUEER T-shirt. At the front of the crowd a banner was being waved—either wholly apposite or completely out of place: SHAME ON DUAL LOYALISTS.

A truck with loudspeakers carried children singing songs of peace. The music was drowned out by young men on another truck with loudspeakers. First they intoned, "The Muslims united will never be defeated," and then "Stop the killing, stop the war." A middle-aged woman dressed as a fairy godmother Rollerbladed between the trucks with a bullhorn. She warbled, "Money for justice, not for bombs. / Money for schools, not guns. / Money for Social Security, too, / when we stop the war," more or less to the tune of "Bibbity Bobbity Boo," from the Disney cartoon *Cinderella*.

What united these people, other than a general loserish quality? Or maybe it was only that. They've made every question a political question, because in politics—as this political demonstration proved—there is no quality control. But the Arab-Americans didn't look like losers. That's all right. Staking a claim to victimhood has value for even the most successful Americans. Witness Oprah,

Rosie, steel tariffs, a farm-subsidy bill benefiting vast wheat and cotton plantations, and the complaints of the “sandwich generation” moms pressed in their upper-middle-class lives between the demands of spoiled young children and those of crabby affluent parents. Property rights are to be had in victimhood. Then there is the charm of a good tantrum—familiar to those of us with a four-year-old in the house. The less meliorable the cause of the tears, the better the tantrum is. Plus, blame negates responsibility. “Who spilled Coca-Cola all over the Third World and crayoned on its walls?” “The World Bank did!” The wonder is not that 75,000 people showed up on April 20. The wonder is that we didn’t all.

The demonstration was fully assembled. Marchers from every participating organization had arrived on the Mall. It was time for the stirring orations. The speakers’ platform was ready by the Reflecting Pool, where Martin Luther King Jr. once stood. But thirty-nine years later it was Cynthia McKinney who strode to the podium. She is the Georgia congresswoman who apologized to Saudi Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal for Mayor Rudolph Giuliani’s refusal of the prince’s \$10 million check for terrorist victims. She also issued a statement saying, “I am not aware of any evidence showing that President Bush or members of his administration have personally profited from the attacks of 9-11. A complete investigation might reveal that to be the case.” And in a speech on recycling she said, “Paper continues to be made from trees.”

McKinney called on “people from all walks of life—students, union members, union members on strike, homeless veterans.” These were all the walks of life she named. She called on the people in them to do something that I could not hear. The members of the crowd had turned away and begun chatting loudly among themselves. Max and I walked to the Metro. We saw a man who had been on the fringes of various demonstrations all day. He had a sign of his own: GOD PLEASE EVERYONE. ■

P. J. O'Rourke is an Atlantic correspondent and the author of several books, including The CEO of the Sofa (2001).



THE INTERNATIONALS

A growing new—but familiar—social order thrives in the world’s trouble spots

.....

The Central Maritime Hotel is a converted Russian hospital ship that was rebuilt in Finland, used as a hotel in Myanmar, and then towed to Dili, the capital of East Timor. A long guarded walkway runs from the shore to a dock beside the ship, and a conspicuous sign there announces, NO THONGS. NO SINGLETs. NO WEAPONS. The joke in the expatriate community is that NO THONGS excludes the Timorese, most of whom wear cheap thong sandals; NO SINGLETs (sleeveless undershirts) keeps out drunken Australians; and NO WEAPONS excludes ordinary UN soldiers.

The restaurant on the Maritime is highly unusual in East Timor, because it takes reservations and accepts credit cards. Virtually all the food and liquor is shipped in from Darwin, Australia, in cargo containers, and each meal is thus a triumph of logistics. Around eight o’clock in the evening the diners begin to arrive. One night recently the restaurant was host to some Korean officers serving in the UN peacekeeping force, some barrel-chested Fijian cops who are now UN policemen, and two thirtyish UN employees on a first date. The Timorese put all these people in the

same category: they’re “internationals”—members of a large and rootless global culture that inevitably establishes itself in the world’s trouble spots. More than 4,000 civilian internationals alone have passed through East Timor in the past two and a half years. Many thousands more are at work around the world.

EAST TIMOR
MARK LEE

East Timor is on one half of a dagger-shaped island directly north of Australia. A former Portuguese colony, it proclaimed its independence in 1975, and was then invaded by Indonesia, which ruled the country for twenty-four brutal years. When the Indonesians pulled out, in 1999, the United Nations arrived with administrators, consultants, policemen, and soldiers. The country is small, approximately the size of Connecticut, and the internationals have had the impact of an occupying army. They are the new colonialists. Unlike the sahibs of British India, they would never use the word “native” or write poems about the white man’s burden, but they nevertheless create a social order that walls them off from the people they serve.

Any UN employee arriving in Dili instantly becomes one of the wealthiest people in the country. Salaries vary, but

internationals working for the UN also receive a daily "mission subsistence allowance" of up to \$100, which is supposed to cover food, lodging, and local transportation. This might be subsistence-level pay in New York City, but it's a fortune in Dili. The internationals there typically rent entire houses, hire servants, and still have enough left over for vacations in Bali. And the MSA isn't taxed, so it's free money, a bonus for being an international. Not long ago, during happy hour at the Roo Bar, in Dili, a UN consultant made a triumphant and typical announcement. "Another day of MSA," he said, and ordered more beer.

George Orwell, who was once a police officer in colonial Burma, analyzed how the British obsession with the pith helmet was just one more way of emphasizing, as he put it, "the differences between the natives and yourself." The internationals in Dili have similar ways of distinguishing themselves from the locals. Few Timorese own cars, but the internationals drive expensive Land Rovers or Toyota Land Cruisers with insignia on the doors. Air-conditioning is another symbol of the economic divide. During the wet season, from December to April, the daytime temperature in Dili regularly reaches 90°, with 80 percent humidity. In this heat the internationals move quickly from air-conditioned homes to air-conditioned cars to air-conditioned offices, thus inhabiting a different climate zone. Then there's the issue of water. Internationals like to carry around 1.5-liter bottles of purified water, and to keep cases of it in their offices. Bottled water has become a status symbol for local drivers who work with several aid organizations in East Timor: they now demand it as part of their compensation.

The old colonialists played polo. The internationals jog. They lace up their Nikes and, just like "mad dogs and Englishmen," trot through Dili in the noonday sun. The Timorese recognize that some people are athletes, and they're proud of their boxers and martial artists. But the idea that an adult would want to put on revealing clothing and expend energy in this way is incomprehensible to them. It's even somewhat shameful. When a squad of Portuguese soldiers ran

up the boulevard on the Dili waterfront one day recently, little boys laughed and pointed at them. An old woman seemed embarrassed and looked away.

Active social scenes for the internationals in Dili are centered on the English-speaking foreigners and the Portuguese, and spending time with either group often feels like an endless journey on a cruise ship with the same people. Drinking in the courtyard of Dili's Turismo Hotel, internationals exchange personal histories like tattered business cards. Their pasts often involve failure—a career at a dead end, a collapsed marriage. Several Americans working for the UN police received their divorce papers after arriving in the country.

For the internationals, East Timor is a hardship post but also a means of escape. A Dutch graduate student who couldn't finish his dissertation suddenly finds himself passing out relief food to hungry refugees. An American cop from a four-man police force is put in charge of 20,000 Timorese in a rural district. In this respect the new colonialism resembles the old version: it gives instant power to those who have never had such power before.

Internationals break free from the nagging responsibilities of ordinary life. No one tells them to wash the dishes, rake the leaves, or remember their father-in-law's birthday. They usually don't have to pay for their gasoline, and for UN flights they don't have to buy a plane ticket. It's impossible not to feel superior in such an environment. This affects the way internationals talk. The locals quickly become *they*. A foreign visitor hears that *they* can't drive. *They* can't fix a computer. *They* can't organize a press conference or march in a parade.

There is one crucial difference between the internationals and the colonialists of the past. A young Frenchman traveling to North Africa, or a Dutchman sailing to Indonesia, could expect to be in the region for a very long time. Many colonial army officers served twenty-five years abroad before they finally retired. Internationals working for UN peace-keeping missions spend six months to a year in any foreign country. Their alle-

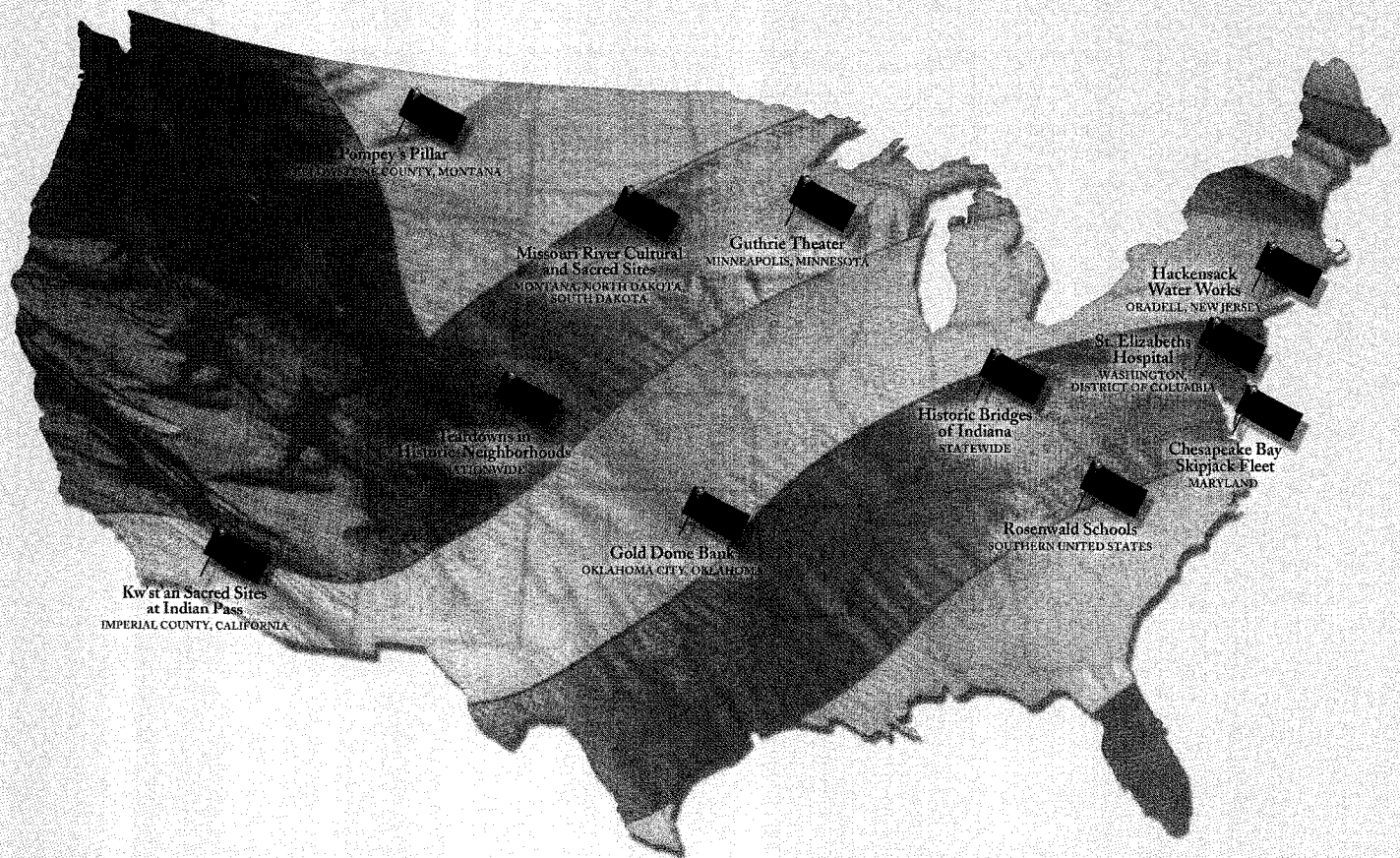
giance is to their career. They have no reason to feel a strong attachment to the people they're helping, because they know they're going to leave. East Timor is a "non-family" post for the UN, and the lack of children or spouses adds to the rootlessness of the situation. Most of those in East Timor haven't bothered to learn more than a few words of Tetum, one of the main island languages. They don't waste time fixing up their homes or planting gardens. Their houses, their cars, their cats, and their Timorese girlfriends will all be left behind. It's the ultimate rental mentality.

There's always an international party going on somewhere in Dili, but even the best party has to end. As the work contracts run out and East Timor becomes self-sufficient, the internationals gossip about possible job openings. "What's Kosovo like?" someone asks. "Is Sierra Leone really that bad?" Some of the internationals are temperamentally suited to this world, and look forward to spending the rest of their lives searching for the excitement of the latest war zone. Others envision a more desperate, and lonelier, future—catching malaria, perhaps, because their systems can no longer tolerate the various preventive drugs. Will they end up alone in a hotel room in Nigeria or Bangladesh? Will they lie sweating on a plastic mattress while lizards scurry up the walls and the ceiling fan spins?

The wise international tries to avoid such thoughts. It's best to organize a weekend beach party or make dinner reservations at the Central Maritime Hotel. On a recent Saturday night a band from Malaysia was playing "Still the One" on the hotel's top deck. A few internationals sat at plastic tables, drinking and staring up at the moon. The Maritime was booked at 90 percent capacity, but the UN is gradually pulling out of East Timor. Perhaps anticipating a drop in revenues, the Thai conglomerate that owns the Maritime is trying to sell the floating hotel. If no buyer is found, the propeller-less ship will be hitched to a tugboat and, like the internationals, will disappear over the horizon. ▀

Mark Lee's novel The Canal House, set in the world of foreign correspondents and aid workers, will be published next spring.

National Trust for Historic Preservation announces America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places 2002 Sponsored by Shell Oil Company



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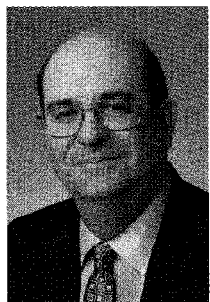
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IMPERIAL COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

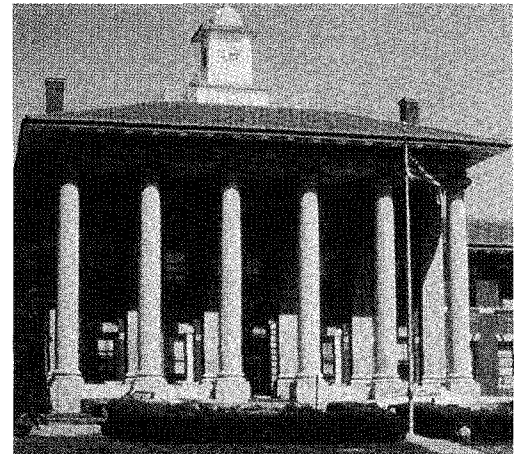
The Indian Pass area near the lower Colorado River is laced with panoramic views, ancient trails, pottery shards, rock art and petroglyphs, and an extensive prehistoric district of ceremonial sites. The Quechan and other tribes have continuously used the site for thousands of years for spiritual teaching, religious pilgrimages, and the sacred *Keruk* ceremony where relatives cremate the deceased and assist in bringing them to the next world. Glamis Gold, Ltd., a Canadian firm, wants to dig huge open pits in this pristine and sacred area to build a

mountain of mine waste and an 880-foot-deep crater. The Department of the Interior, which manages the land, denied the permit in 2000, but last year the department reversed that decision. If the mine is approved, the federal government would effectively be asking the Quechan people to give up their souls for an ounce of gold.

St. Elizabeths Hospital

WASHINGTON,
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Opened in the mid-1850s and now America's oldest large-scale government-run mental hospital, this National Historic Landmark fondly known as "St. E's" is an architectural marvel. More than forty historic structures, many designed by famous architects, grace its handsomely landscaped 300-acre campus, and it is a pioneering medical facility where innovative methods of treating mentally ill patients were introduced and refined. St. E's was



Administration building, St. Elizabeths Hospital

intended as a refuge for people whose lives had fallen apart. Today the hospital itself is crumbling. A shrinking patient population has left many buildings vacant, and many of those still in use are in various states of disrepair. A comprehensive revitalization plan, viable new uses for vacant and underutilized buildings, and adequate funding for repair, maintenance, and renovation could help end the hospital's status as one of Washington's least-known treasures—and could help make St. E's a vibrant symbol of rebirth in one of the city's most significant historic neighborhoods.



Indian Pass

massive, 1,600-acre, cyanide heap-leach gold mine, creating a 280-foot-high

of treating mentally ill patients were introduced and refined. St. E's was



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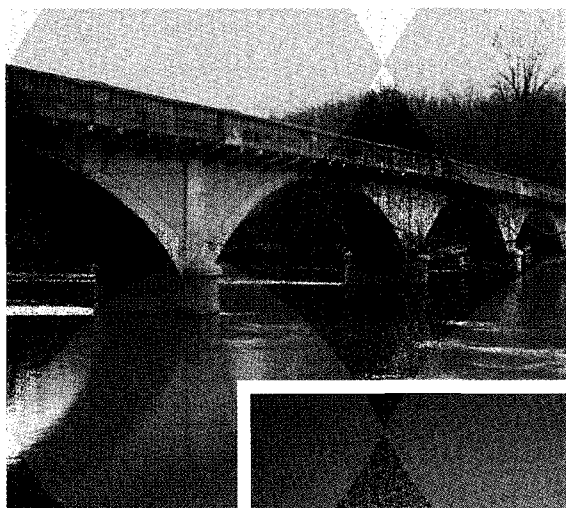


Count on Shell

Historic Bridges of Indiana

STATEWIDE

Across Indiana are hundreds of historic bridges that comprise important parts of the state's—and the nation's—industrial and transportation heritage, but poor planning and conflicting interests are causing the demolition of many of these spans. Communities often understand the historic value of their bridges, but local officials violate established regulations that require a



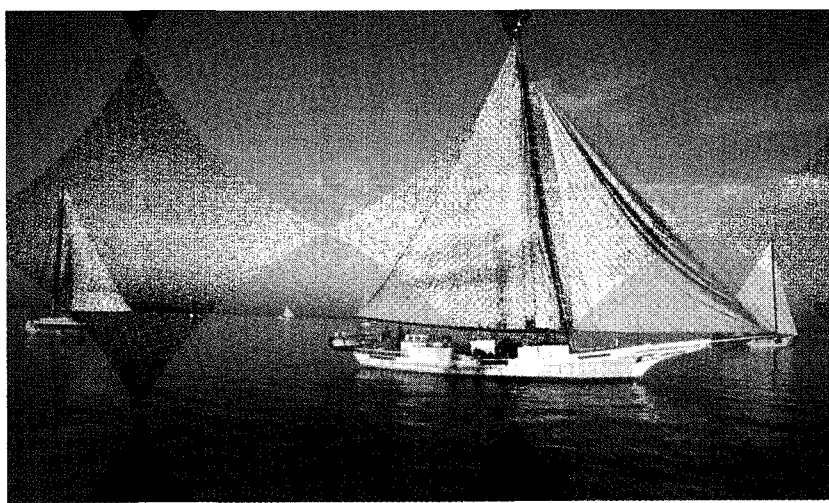
strong presumption in favor of preservation. Planners often decide on demolition before asking for local input. Local governments too often replace historic bridges instead of renovating them, even though rehabilitation is generally cheaper. The consequences of these shortsighted approaches are already clear: between 1987 and 1999, Indiana lost 62 percent of its metal bridges built between 1860 and 1930. The state needs to create a preservation plan

and comply with federal regulations, so these critical parts of Indiana's history remain a bridge between the past and the future.

Chesapeake Bay Skipjack Fleet

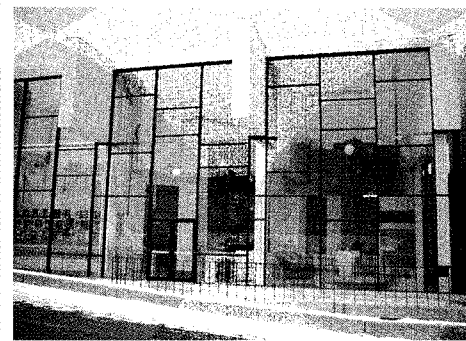
MARYLAND

For more than a century, wooden sailing vessels called skipjacks—named for a type of bluefish that skips across the water—have been used to harvest oysters in Chesapeake Bay. The only remaining sail-powered commercial fleet in America, skipjacks, with their striking white-painted hulls and brightly colored tailboards, are arguably the most beloved bay craft, a link with the time when the bountiful natural resources of the Chesapeake



A Carroll County, Indiana, bridge (top), and Chesapeake Bay skipjacks

apeake supported the economy of the entire mid-Atlantic region. However, due largely to a decline in oyster harvesting, only thirteen of the original 1,000 single-masted vessels are still in commercial use. The dwindling fleet needs a lifeline in the form of funding assistance for restoration and maintenance, affordable liability and hull insurance, and identification of new uses. Without these measures, there is a very real chance that within a few years no



Guthrie Theater

skipjacks will grace the waters of the Chesapeake, and a century-old way of life will be lost.

Guthrie Theater

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

In the middle of the nation's heartland, the Guthrie Theater is the Twin Cities' answer to the Great White Way. A work of striking originality, the Guthrie, which opened in 1963, is the realized dream of Sir Tyrone Guthrie, a visionary impresario who sought to create a world-class repertory company far from the pressures of Broadway. Designed by Ralph Rapson, a leading contributor to architecture's modern movement, the 1,300-seat theater's thrust stage, acoustical ceiling clouds, and multi-colored seats revolutionized theater design and created

an atmosphere of immediacy and intimacy felt by actors and audiences alike. Now the Guthrie Theater Company plans to abandon the facility and build a new home. The Walker Art Center, which owns the Guthrie, intends to tear it down and replace it with a sculpture garden and an underground parking garage. If the Walker is allowed to go through with its plan, a genuine cultural landmark will face its final curtain call.

Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana (left), David W. Harp



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Pompey's Pillar

YELLOWSTONE COUNTY,
MONTANA

Pompey's Pillar National Monument is one of the nation's most prominent sites associated with the Lewis and Clark Expedition. William Clark carved his name and date into the sandstone in 1806, leaving the only physical record along the 8,000-mile expedition route. Pompey's Pillar also bears prehistoric markings by Native Americans and remains to this day a place of spiritual significance. Now, grain exporter United Harvest, Inc., wants to build a hundred-acre trucking and railroad terminal with four 150-foot-tall grain elevators that will loom next to Pompey's Pillar. Local opponents believe this will harm the landscape surrounding this historic and religious site. The National Trust for Historic Preservation is joining them to propose alternative sites, but United Harvest has ignored those suggestions and is pushing ahead with its plans. Putting this massive industrial facility next to Pompey's Pillar would be like building a fifteen-story factory next to the Grand Canyon or Mount Rushmore.

upper Missouri River basin. Humans first settled in this region approximately 12,500 years ago, and over the years, the river ecosystem and wildlife attracted numerous groups of indigenous people. The river val-



Teardown, California (top), Missouri River basin, South Dakota

ley is filled with archeological and sacred sites, burial grounds, and old homesteads. These sites tell us about the culture of the people who called this region their home, and remain a vital part of the lives of their descendants. Today, the federal government's reservoir and dam projects are destroy-

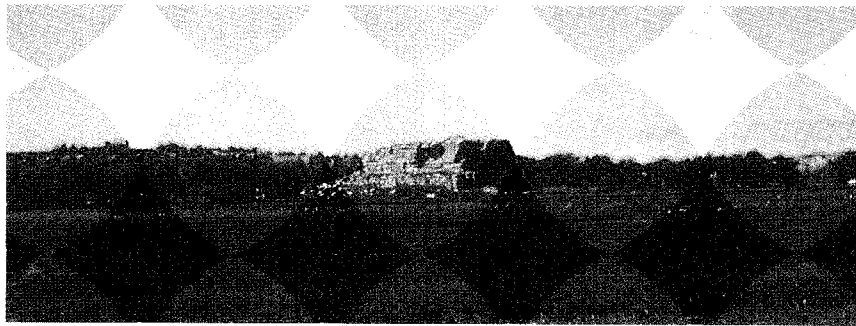
Teardowns in Historic Neighborhoods

NATIONWIDE

Remember those childhood puzzles where you have to pick out something that doesn't belong? That's what teardowns are like. As prop-

erty values have skyrocketed and buildable land has become scarce, neighborhoods have experienced an epidemic of teardowns. From suburban Seattle to the neighborhoods of Washington, D.C., and everywhere in between, older homes are being purchased, demolished, and replaced by looming behemoths. The result is quiet residential streets dotted with Cape Cods and bungalows, and one or more "McMansions"—new homes that are often two or three times the size of the surrounding houses—wedged on tiny lots and dwarfing everything in view. Many targeted neighborhoods are historic but not afforded protection, and provisions regulating setbacks, floor-to-area ratios, and garage size and placement are in short supply. The architecture of America's historic suburban neighborhoods reflects the character and development of our communities. If neighborhoods don't assume greater control, teardowns will erode the fabric of these communities, house by house.

John Miller/Heizer (left), Adrian Fine



Pompey's Pillar

Missouri River Cultural and Sacred Sites

MONTANA, NORTH DAKOTA,
SOUTH DAKOTA

Crossing both Dakotas and Montana, this site consists of 1,515 miles of the

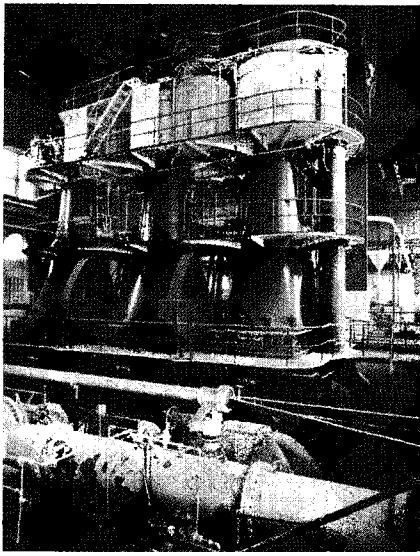
ing Native American burial sites and archeological resources at an alarming rate, even exposing the remains of tribal ancestors. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers continues to ignore federal laws that require the Corps to take responsibility for protecting these resources. The tribes of the Missouri River valley are simply asking the federal government to obey the law.



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Hackensack Water Works

Hackensack Water Works

ORADELL, NEW JERSEY

It has been described as "the history of the Industrial Revolution in one building," but now the Hackensack Water Works, built in 1881, is running out of steam. Situated on an island in the middle of the Hackensack River, the red-brick Romanesque Revival buildings of the Water Works house steam, hydraulic, and electric equipment dating from the turn of the century to the modern day. For more than a hundred years, the water purification facility, a rare and remarkably intact nineteenth-century example of American ingenuity, faithfully served northern New Jersey's expanding suburban population. Now, Bergen County, which has allowed the site to deteriorate since the plant shut down in the 1990s, wants to demolish most of the buildings and deliberately convert the site to a "ruin." Local preservation groups oppose the plan, hoping instead to create a history, science, and technology museum that will showcase a marvel of American engineering and a monument to our nation's industrial development.

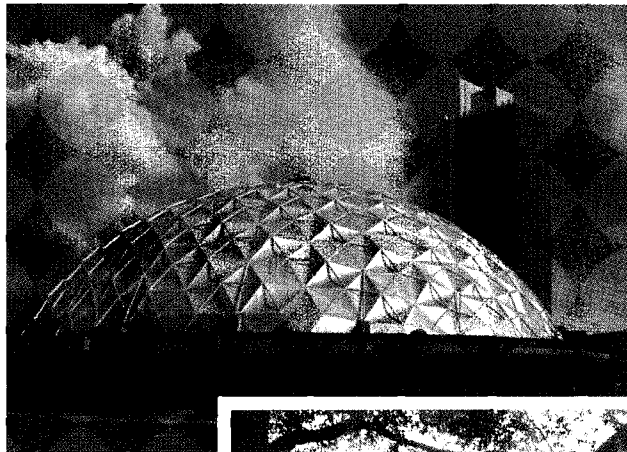


Count on Shell

Gold Dome Bank

OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLAHOMA

Two of Oklahoma City's most recognizable landmarks are the state capitol and the eye-catching aluminum structure known as the Gold Dome Bank. Ironically a new dome is now being constructed at the capitol, while the Gold Dome faces the threat of imminent demolition. Built in 1958 to house a bank on historic Route 66, the structure is an early example of the geodesic dome patented by designer and futurist Buckminster Fuller. Claiming that the building no longer meets the bank's needs and requires extensive repairs, Bank One, the current owner, wants to



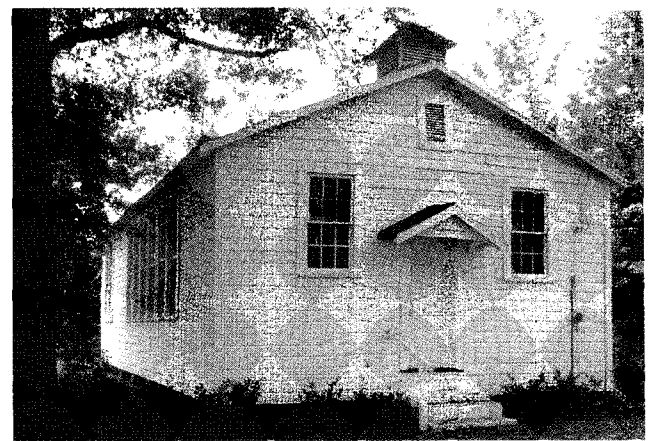
tear it down and replace it with a smaller bank and additional retail development. Preservationists have mounted a campaign to save the dome but some residents feel that it was built too recently to merit preservation. Currently it enjoys only limited protection under the city's preservation ordinance. If demolition plans proceed, this shimmering golden vision of the future will be a thing of the past.

Rosenwald Schools

SOUTHERN UNITED STATES

When Chicago philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck and Co., learned of the dismal state of education among African Americans in the rural South, he decided to do something about it. Using a concept developed by Booker T. Washington and architectural plans initially produced by professors at the Tuskegee Institute, the Rosenwald Fund awarded matching grants that helped build more than 5,300 schools from Maryland to Texas between 1913 and 1932, directly impacting the lives of an estimated half-million Americans. But in recent years, many of these schools have fallen down or are in

ruins. The number and location of surviving schools are poorly documented: only thirty of Texas's 527 Rosenwald schools have been positively identified, for example. Increased public awareness, a comprehensive effort to locate and



Gold Dome Bank (top), and a Rosenwald school, North Carolina

assess the condition of Rosenwald buildings, and the development of funding sources and viable new uses are needed to ensure that these symbols of generosity, hope, and pride are not lost.

The National Trust is a private, nonprofit organization funded by donations, dues, and merchandise sales. To become a member or to receive more information about the 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list, write to 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036; call 800-315-NTHP (6847); or visit the Trust's Web site, at www.nationaltrust.org.

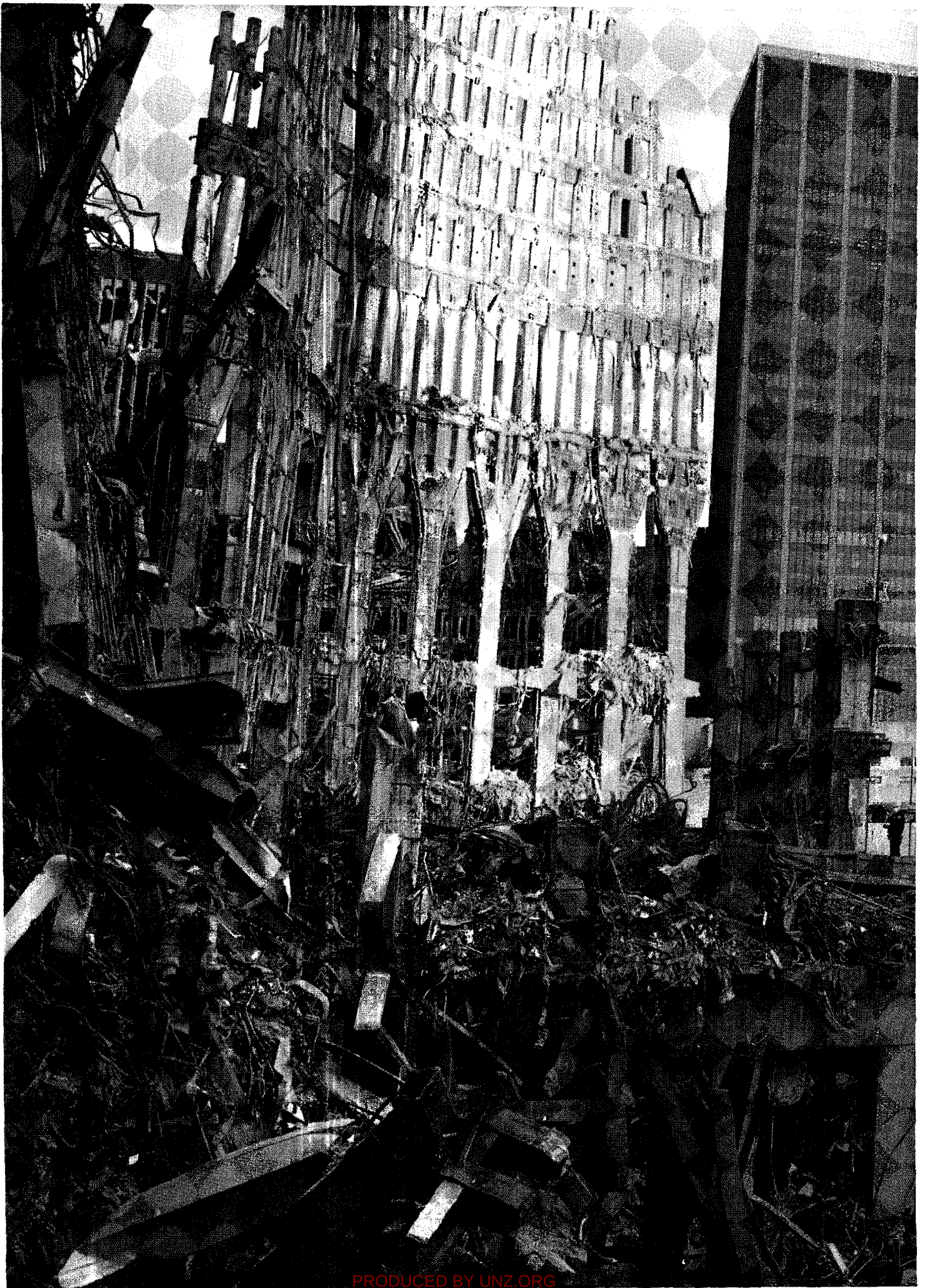
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AMERICAN GROUND: Unbuilding the World Trade Center

*After nine months of unrivaled access to the disaster site,
our correspondent tells the inside story of the recovery effort.
This is the first installment in a three-part series*

BY WILLIAM LANGEWIESCHE

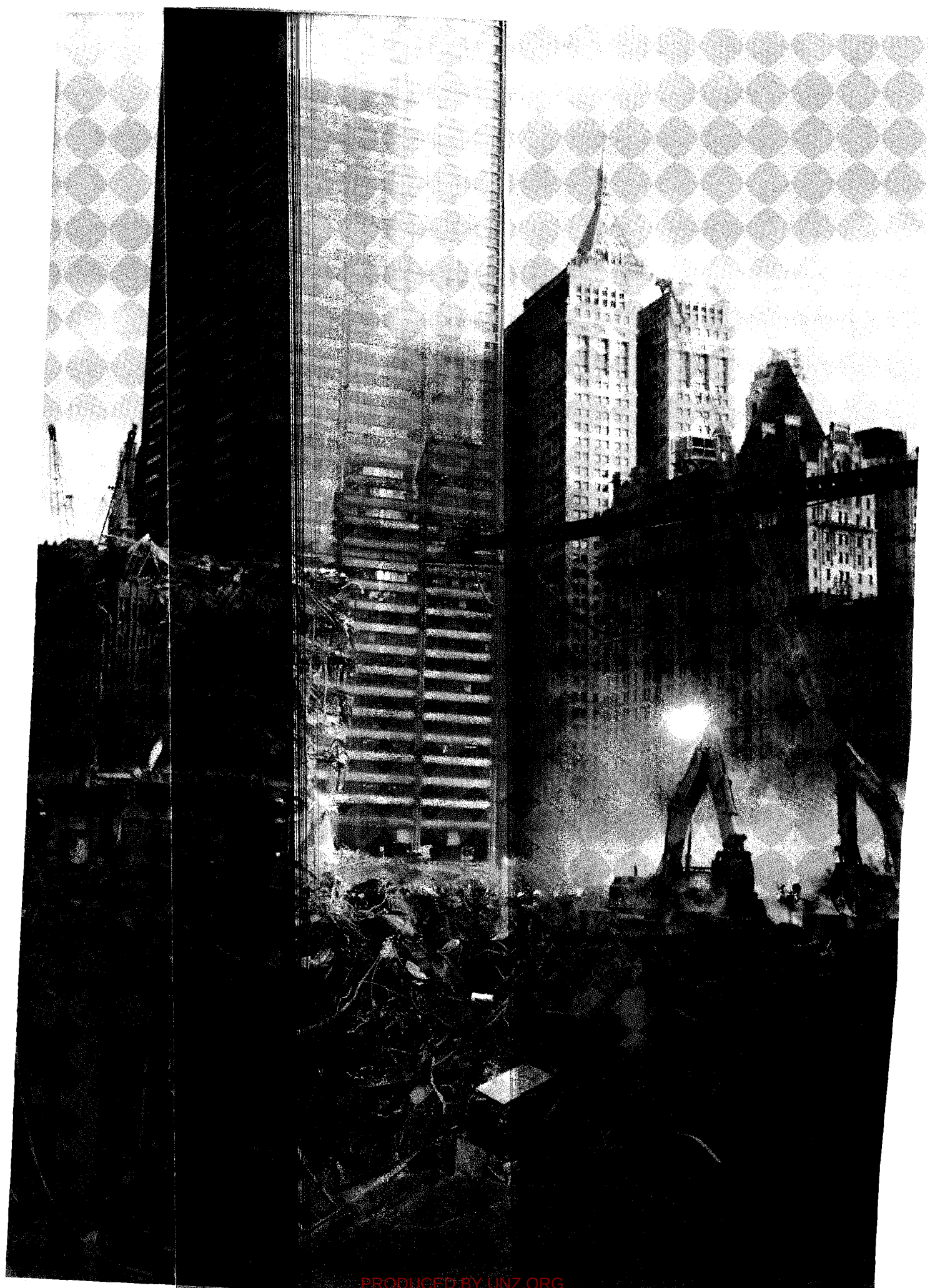
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PART ONE: THE INNER WORLD

WHEN THE TWIN TOWERS COLLAPSED, ON THE warm, bright morning of September 11, 2001, they made a sound heard variously around New York as a roar, a growl, or distant thunder. The South Tower was the first to go. At 9:59 its upper floors tilted briefly before dropping, disintegrating, and driving the building straight down to the ground. The fall lasted ten seconds, as did the sound. Many people died, but mercifully fast. Twenty-nine minutes later the North Tower collapsed just as quickly, and with much the same result. Somehow a few people survived. For an instant, each tower left its imprint in the air, a phantom of pulverized concrete marking a place that then became a memory. Prefabricated

Photographs by Joel Meyerowitz, courtesy of the Ariel Meyerowitz Gallery and the Museum of the City of New York





sections of the external steel columns tumbled down onto lesser buildings, piling onto terraces and rooftops, punching through parking structures, offices, and stores, inducing secondary collapses and igniting fires. The most catastrophic effects were eerily selective: with the exception of Saint Nicholas, a tiny Greek Orthodox church that dissolved in the rain of steel, the only buildings completely wrecked were those that carried the World Trade Center label. There were seven of them, and ultimately none endured. Not even the so-called World Trade Center Seven, a relatively new forty-seven-floor tower that stood independently across the street from the complex, was able to escape the fate associated with its name. Though it did not seem seriously wounded at first, it burned persistently throughout the day, and that evening became the first steel-frame high-rise in history to fall solely because of fire.

There was wider damage, of course, and on the scale of ordinary disasters it was heavy. For thirty years the Twin Towers had stood above the streets as all tall buildings do, as a bomb of sorts, a repository for the prodigious energy originally required to raise so much weight so high. Now, in a single morning, in twin ten-second pulses, the towers released that energy back into New York. Massive steel beams flew through the neighborhood like gargantuan spears, penetrating subway lines and underground passages to depths of thirty feet, crushing them, rupturing water mains and gas lines, and stabbing high into the sides of nearby office towers, where they lodged. The phone system, the fiber-optic network, and the electric power grid were knocked out. Ambulances, cars, and fire trucks were smashed flat by falling debris, and some were hammered five floors down from the street into the insane turmoil erupting inside the World Trade Center's immense "bathtub"—a ten-acre foundation hole, seventy feet deep, that suffered unimaginable violence as it absorbed the brunt of each tower's collapse.

The energy released within that wild, inaccessible core lit fires that cooked the ruins for months afterward. Outside of each tower's footprint, and still within the foundation hole, it demolished most of the six-story subterranean structure—consisting largely of parking garages that were either pulverized or badly broken and left to hang. Deep underground it also destroyed part of the Port Authority Trans-Hudson (PATH) commuter line—a railroad from New Jersey that, having passed in a single-track tube through the watery muck of the river's bottom, emerged into the foundation hole and traveled to a station on the far side before looping back to a parallel tube and returning under the river to New Jersey. The PATH tubes were century-old cast-iron structures, probably brittle in places, and now at immediate risk of failure. If either of them broke catastrophically, the Hudson River would flood into the foundation hole, filling it at high tide to a level just five feet below the street, and drowning unknown numbers of trapped survivors. More-

over, on the far side of the river a wall of water would flood the Jersey City station, and from there, via connecting rail links, would circle uncontrollably back into Manhattan, rush through the passages beneath Greenwich Village, and take out the West Side subways from the southern tip of the island nearly to Central Park. Vulnerability to sequential flooding was a known weakness of the PATH system, and it had been highlighted in a report circulated discreetly among government officials after the earlier World Trade Center attack: the parking-garage bombing of February 26, 1993. But maybe because such flooding was also something of an apocalyptic vision—and therefore somehow unreal—no defenses were erected against it. Of course now it was too late. And immediately as the Twin Towers collapsed, it became obvious that even in America apocalypses could come to pass.

On the surface the scene was just as rough. At the southwest corner of the World Trade Center complex the twenty-two-floor Marriott hotel was transformed into a raw, boxy thing three stories high. Just to the north, across West Street, a pedestrian bridge gave way, killing groups of firemen and office workers who had sheltered beneath it. The streets buckled under heaps of smoking steel. So much heavy debris fell across the access routes that rescue vehicles were rendered useless. Major fires ignited in all directions. Simultaneously, air-pressure waves shifted small cars and shattered windows for several blocks around, blowing powdery World Trade Center remains into apartments and across the chest-high partitions of corporate offices. The powder was made primarily of crushed concrete. The waves generated winds that pushed it through the streets in dense, choking clouds and lifted it to mix with smoke and darken the morning. Then all the white paperwork floated down on the city as if in mockery of the dead.

The suddenness of the transformation was difficult to accept. It had taken merely one brief morning, merely twenty seconds of collapse, and now all that remained standing of the Twin Towers was a few skeletal fragments of the lower walls, the vaguely gothic structures that reached like supplicating hands toward the sky. After the dust storms settled, people on the streets of Lower Manhattan were calm. They walked instead of running, talked without shouting, and tried to regain their sense of place and time. Hiroshima is said to have been similar in that detail. The site itself remained frightening because of the confusion of ruins and the possibility of further attacks or collapses. But a reversal soon occurred by which people began moving toward the disaster rather than away from it. The reaction was largely spontaneous, and it cut across the city's class lines as New Yorkers of all backgrounds tried to respond. A surprising number of stockbrokers, shopkeepers, artists, and others got involved. For the most part, however, it was the workers with hardhats, union cards, and claims to a manual trade who were able to get past the police checkpoints that had

been established earlier that morning, after the first airplane struck. Few of these workers lived in Manhattan, though typically they were there that morning on jobs. They hailed from Staten Island, Brooklyn, the Bronx, Queens, and New Jersey, and most had accents to prove it. From the start, therefore, the recovery site was what it remained: an outer-borough New York blue-collar scene—overwhelmingly Irish, Italian, and male, terribly unrepresentative by social measures, and yet authentic.

Arriving at the site over the first few hours, the volunteers joined with the firefighters and the police, who by then were shaking off their disbelief and struggling to take effective action. By afternoon thousands of people in these combined forces were searching through the ruins for survivors, attacking the debris by hand, forming bucket brigades, and climbing over the smoking pile that in some places rose fifty feet above the street. At 5:20 World Trade Center Seven collapsed tidily in place, damaging some adjacent buildings but killing no one. By dark the first clattering generators lit the scene, and an all-American outpouring of equipment and supplies began to arrive. The light stuff got there first: soda pop and bottled water, sandwiches, flashlights, bandages, gloves, blankets, respirators,

zone either. There was sadness to the site, to be sure, and anger, but there was none of the emptiness—the ghostly quality of abandonment—that lurks in the aftermath of battle. In fact, quite the opposite quality materialized here: within hours of the collapse, as the rescuers rushed in and resources were marshaled, the disaster was smothered in an exuberant and distinctly American embrace. Despite the apocalyptic nature of the scene, the response was unhesitant and almost childishly optimistic: it was simply understood that you would find survivors, and then that you would find the dead, and that this would help their families to get on with their lives, and that your resources were unlimited, and that you would work night and day to clean up the mess, and that this would allow the world's greatest city to rebuild quickly, and maybe even to make itself into something better than before. From the first hours these assumptions were never far away.

For a few days the site was out of control. The bucket brigades were ineffectual, and barely scratched the surface of the ruins—not through lack of trying, God knows, but because of the overwhelming weight of the debris. In the end it probably didn't matter, because, as later became apparent, the dead did not die lingering deaths. At the time,

The most catastrophic effects were eerily selective: with the exception of Saint Nicholas, a tiny Greek Orthodox church that dissolved in the rain of steel, the only buildings completely wrecked were the seven that carried the World Trade Center label.

and clothes. Indeed, there were so many donations so soon that the clutter became a problem, hindering the rescue effort. Eventually a trucking operation was set up just to haul the excess away.

People who came to the site in those early days often had the same first sensation, of leaving the city and walking into a dream. Many also felt when they saw the extent of the destruction that they had stumbled into a war zone. "It's like something you'd see in the movies," people said. Probably so, but my own reaction was different when I first went in, soon after the attacks. After years of traveling through the back corners of the world, I had an unexpected sense not of the strangeness of this scene but of its familiarity. Wading through the debris on the streets, climbing through the newly torn landscapes, breathing in the mixture of smoke and dust, it was as if I had wandered again into the special havoc that failing societies tend to visit upon themselves. This time they had visited it upon us. The message seemed to be "Here's a sample of our political science." I was impressed by how faithfully the effects had been reproduced on the ground.

But you could never confuse New York with a back corner of the world, and the ruins did not actually look like a war

however, this was neither known nor knowable. Indeed, very little was. Rumors swept the exhausted crowds of workers, and on multiple occasions caused dangerous stampedes away from the imagined reach of One Liberty Plaza, a sound building that was said to be falling. People were hurt in those panics. There were too many volunteers and too few heavy machines.

But then, rather quickly, a crude management structure was agreed upon, and most of the volunteers were eased out to the ruins' periphery, to be replaced at the core by a professional labor force that might loosely respond to direction—firemen and cops on overtime, structural and civil engineers, and up to 3,000 unionized construction workers. The city government ran the show. The agency charged with managing the physical work was an unlikely one. It was the Department of Design and Construction (DDC), an obscure bureaucracy 1,300 strong whose normal responsibility was to oversee municipal construction contracts—for sidewalk and street repairs, jails, and the like—and whose offices were not even in Manhattan but in Queens. The DDC was given the lead for the simple reason that its two top officials, a man named Kenneth Holden and his lieutenant, Michael Burton, had emerged from the chaos

of September 11 as the most effective of the responders. Now they found themselves running a billion-dollar operation with the focus of the nation upon them.

Nearly everyone at the site was well paid. The money for the effort came from federal emergency funds, and it flowed freely. But despite some serious cases of corruption and greed, money was not the main motivation here—at least *not until almost the end*. Throughout the winter and into the spring the workers rarely forgot the original act of aggression, or the fact that nearly 3,000 people had died there, including the friends and relatives of some who were toiling in the debris. They were reminded of this constantly, not only by the frequent discovery of human remains, and the somber visits from grieving families, but also by the emotional response of America as a whole, and the powerful new iconography that was associated with the disaster—these New York firemen as tragic heroes, these skeletal walls, these smoking ruins as America's hallowed ground. Whether correctly or not, the workers believed that an important piece of history was playing out, and they wanted to participate in it—often fervently, and past the point of fatigue. From the start that was the norm. There were some who could not stand the stress, and they had to leave. But among the thousands who stayed, almost all sought greater involvement rather than less.

The truth is that people relished the experience. It's obvious that they would never have wished this calamity on themselves or others, but inside the perimeter lines and beyond the public's view it served for many of them as an unexpected liberation—a national tragedy of course, but one that was contained, unambiguous, and surprisingly energizing. Was this not war, after all? Probably it was, though at some early and entirely willing stage of the fighting: people believed wholeheartedly that they were righting a wrong, and that it was their duty to act quickly. The urgency of the job swept away ordinary responsibilities and the everyday dullness of family life, and it made nonsense of office paperwork and tedious professional routines. Traditional hierarchies broke down too. The problems that had to be solved were largely unprecedented. Action and invention were required on every level, often with no need or possibility of asking permission. As a result, within the vital new culture that grew up at the Trade Center site even the lowliest laborers and firemen were given power. Many of them rose to it, and some of them sank. Among those who gained the greatest influence were people without previous rank who discovered balance and ability within themselves, and who in turn were discovered by others. The unexpected ones were front-line firemen and construction workers, young engineers, and obscure city employees. Their success in the midst of chaos was an odd twist in the story of these monolithic buildings that in the final stretch of the twentieth century had stood so visibly for the totalitarian ideals of planning and control. But the buildings

were not buildings anymore, and the place where they fell had become a tabula rasa for the United States. Among the ruins now, a large and unscripted experiment in American life had gotten under way.

The site roared twenty-four hours a day for eight full months and beyond. From autumn through winter and into spring the crews labored in twelve-hour shifts, got some sleep, and came back for more. The enormous scale of their workplace is difficult to convey. Under Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's insistence that New York return quickly to normal, the restricted zone had shrunk by late September to forty downtown blocks bounded by Chambers, Broadway, Rector, and the Hudson River—which was still a large area to be out of commission. At the heart of it, under the skeletal walls rising to 150 feet above the street, the debris spread across seventeen acres in smoldering mounds. It was dangerous ground, of course. Workers at the site called it simply "the pile." In detail the topography was complex, with strange craters and caves, unstable cliffs, and unexpected remnants of the World Trade Center as it had been before—the torn sculptural sphere on the ruined plaza, the amputated stores with their displays of goods no longer for sale, a row of bicycles still securely chained to a rack, a lamppost here or there still standing.

Passersby peering at the ruins from afar, from beyond the perimeter fences along Broadway or Chambers, were sometimes confused because of their lack of direct involvement: many expressed amazement that two 110-story buildings could collapse into a mass that was relatively so small. But there was no mystery to the dimensions. Because the Twin Towers had been as much as 90 percent air and 10 percent structure, they had contained the equivalent of approximately eleven solid stories of steel and concrete—and beneath these uneven mounds, which stood five stories high and spilled into the streets, their remnants filled the foundation hole to bedrock, six levels down.

Indeed, from the workers' close-in view, the ruins accounted for the former buildings all too precisely. It became apparent that the initial release of powdered concrete into the air, however large it had been, had amounted to an insignificant proportion of the total weight, and that almost every pound of the original structure remained to be extracted, inspected, and hauled away. So the ruins were not small at all. On the scale of people at the site they were in fact gargantuan—not mounds but mountains that reduced the expeditions venturing out across them to ant-sized columns traversing steel slopes. More than 1.5 million tons of heavy steel and debris lay densely compacted there, tied together like steel wool and complicated by the existence of human remains.

The weight alone defied imagination. What does a chaos of 1.5 million tons really mean? What does it even look like? The scene up close was so large that no one quite knew. In other countries clear answers would have been

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sought before action was taken. Learned committees would have been formed, and high authorities consulted. The ruins would have been pondered, and a tightly scripted response would have been imposed. Barring that, soldiers would have assumed control. But for whatever reasons, probably cultural, probably profound, little of the sort happened among these ruins, where the learned committees were excluded, and the soldiers were relegated to the unhappy role of guarding the perimeter, and civilians in heavy machines simply rolled in and took on the unknown.

The most effective of these machines were giant diesel excavators—tracked monsters with hydraulic arms and grappler claws that could tear tangles of concrete and steel rods from the surface, or close around sections of heavy beams and worry them clear of the pile's embrace, one by one. They were voracious, incautious, ignorant, and unstoppable. Soon there were dozens of them in action, painted orange or yellow, working in tandem to "daisy chain" the debris out to the trucking operation in the streets, straining and rocking precariously under their loads, with smoke and heavy dust boiling out around them, and flames licking their claws. For months this was how the unbuilding went—like a dance of dinosaurs in a volcanic land of steel, with men there too, moving through, restlessly searching for their kind. The effects were astonishing. Though the enormousness of the ruins made the final goal of "a clean hole" seem remote and difficult to imagine, the surface features of the pile changed so fast that time itself was compressed, and memories just a week old grew faint. People got caught up in that. Many of the core group were camped in hotels or temporary apartments nearby. The smart ones reminded themselves that they had recently led ordinary lives, and that they would return to them. But weeks felt like months, and months felt like years, and as winter came, it was ordinary life, and not the site, that began to seem dreamlike and far away.

Early on I found a piece of high ground from which to watch the changes. It was inside the severely damaged and deserted Bankers Trust building, a black steel structure forty floors high, which stood across Liberty Street from the ruins and was eventually draped in dark safety netting and hung with a large American flag. In 1999 the German company Deutsche Bank had absorbed the Bankers Trust Corporation, and with it had acquired this building, whose offices it had occupied until the attack. During the South Tower's collapse steel spears and column sections had plunged into Bankers Trust, tearing a huge gash in its north face, destroying a load-bearing column for ten floors, spilling tons of office innards, and leaving the partially demolished floor slabs to sag like hammocks over a deadly void. In a crater at the base a mound of rubble lay laced with the remains of people who had been killed in the South Tower or on the street. There

was serious concern at first that the building would not stand, but it did, and sturdily, because of redundancies in its design. The back offices, away from the Trade Center, were fine. And apparently no one had died inside. Firemen checked the spaces quickly, leaving their fluorescent-orange graffiti—SEARCHED—on each floor. In the dust that coated one wood-paneled wall someone, maybe from the Boston Fire Department's team, drew a sad face and scrawled,

Kill All Muslims
9-11-01
B.F.D.

Then for a long time the Bankers Trust building was left alone.

Out of curiosity I went there one afternoon, and climbed a broken escalator to a ruined entranceway that was lit through blasted walls and shattered windows, and strewn with rubble. The air inside was hazy with smoke from the fires across the street. Wearing gloves and a rubber respirator mask, I stirred through the rubble like an archaeologist on contaminated ground, searching for traces of its former inhabitants—in this case the bankers of just a few weeks before. The search was disappointing, because the forces of destruction had swept the entranceway clear of their presence. But then I climbed a dead dark stairwell, and several floors higher emerged into a scene richly preserved from their lives.

It was the Deutsche Bank executive dining area, torn open at one end, and covered in the gray Trade Center dust, but otherwise intact—a narrow hallway, hung with art, giving onto a string of small private dining rooms that were acoustically damped and intended to facilitate privileged conversation. In a foyer, by a vase of plastic flowers, a menu dated September 11, 2001, showed the morning's breakfast: smoked-salmon omelets and chocolate-filled pancakes, among other offerings. The business cards of the host, a man named Mohamed Idrissi, lay on a countertop next to a telephone and a closed reservation book. I explored the hallway, moving carefully out of respect for the museumlike quality of the scenes, some of which, judging from the pristine condition of the dust, had remained untouched since the Trade Center's collapse. Each little dining room was furnished austere with a table and four straight-backed chairs, a button for summoning service, and a telephone. Most of the rooms had been unoccupied at the time of the attack, and were set for lunch—with fresh place mats, plates and utensils, and sets of stemmed glasses, some of which had been capsized and broken by the pressure waves and lay now as they had fallen, like everything else here, under a feathery gauze of the Twin Towers' remains.

Down the hallway I discovered a dining room that had been in use, evidently by two people, whose breakfast still

Right: the Bankers Trust building



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sat on the table as they had left it. At the center of the table was a platter of fruit—oranges, apples, and a stem of withering grapes. Beyond it lay the remains of the meal in progress—an omelet mostly eaten, a bowl of cereal mostly not, pastries in a napkin bed, two nearly finished coffees (one creamy, one black), two types of sugar cubes (both brown and white), a toasted English muffin, four little unopened jars of jam, a display of artfully overlaid butter patties, and two glasses of orange juice, half drunk and now darkening with age. The former occupants had a ghostly presence there that was hinted at by the patterns they had left behind. They seemed to have maintained their poise at the time of their escape. The silverware was laid carefully aside, the napkins were on the table, the chairs were pushed back just slightly. It looked as if they had slipped politely away. It appeared to be a mutual thing, as if they had encouraged in each other a sense of decorum and calm.

The opposite was true at the end of the hall, where in a conference room I came upon a scene of mass panic and flight. It was the remnant of a breakfast meeting for about twenty people—a U-shaped array of tables facing a display board, and a varied buffet with the food looking almost still edible. Somehow the attendees must have known that the evacuation was no drill. In their haste to escape they abandoned their briefcases and overnight bags, and even dropped some car keys and purses. I poked through the detritus, knowing from the disturbed dust that I was not the first visitor to have done so. Indeed, it became obvious from the traces where laptops had been, and from all the opened bags, that the room had been systematically rifled for valuables—whether by errant firemen, policemen, or construction workers hardly mattered. All three groups were at various times implicated in a widespread pattern of looting that started even before the towers fell, and was to peak around Christmas with the brazen theft of office computers from this very building. The psychology involved was complex, and had more to do with the breakdown of the social order—a sense of crisis and of special privilege—than with any particularly criminal inclination to steal. People urinated on the carpets in Deutsche Bank as well. And presumably the same people who had robbed this room had also written “Fuck Bin Laden” on the display board, because a righteous sense of war was part of the package too.

But to me none of that seemed important anyway. Whether they had been violated or remained pure, the Deutsche Bank dining rooms were artifacts from an event that, within the inner world of the World Trade Center, seemed already to exist in distant history. Through the winter I kept returning to them, these set pieces from the past, and with every visit I felt satisfaction that they remained untouched. The pastries petrified. The juices slowly evaporated and, like the coffee, turned into black crusts. The fresh fruits fermented. For a while they were infested with gnats and other bugs, and then not. I never found out why

the rooms were neglected, in part because Deutsche Bank responded to the September 11 attacks in a cowed Neither-we-nor-our-employees-will-comment style. The City of New York eventually shored up Bankers Trust for the safety of the streets below, but otherwise the building was left alone. No one was sure whether ultimately it would be torn down or restored; stories flew back and forth, and settled finally on a rumor about an insurance standoff over mold.

Fine. Bankers Trust was at its best as a ghost building anyway. You could use it to go back in time to a little bridge that spanned a sudden change in the story of the United States—not the grand “loss of innocence” proclaimed that fall in the press but, more modestly, a shift from an era of complacency preceding the attack to a period of creative turbulence just afterward. You could also then go upstairs, stand in the building’s open wound, and look out at the turbulence in action across the magnificent smoking terrain of the Trade Center site—this ever changing American geography. If there were others standing beside you, the conversation would often be about memory. Do you remember when the pile was high, and then higher than now? When all the skeletal walls stood, or when one or another came down? When the upper road was built, or the lower road, or the first Tully ramp, or the second? When the Liberty Street wall sagged, or when the outline of the foundation hole became visible from above, or when we dove underground along the east wall by the escalator box—where is that now? Do you remember the day when there were twenty bodies, and the week when there were none? Or even, Do you remember the Twin Towers themselves? Can you really quite imagine them anymore?

The underground, beneath the pile, was a wilderness of ruins, a short walk from the city but as far removed from life there as any place could be. It burned until January, and because it contained voids and weakened structures, it collapsed progressively until the spring. From the start its condition dictated the nature and location of the work on the surface. Specific knowledge was necessary not only to protect the people on the pile, particularly from cave-ins, but also to maintain the integrity of the now precariously supported “slurry wall,” a seventy-foot-high concrete shell that enclosed the foundation hole to keep the tidal waters of New York Harbor from flooding in. The job of mapping the chaos fell to a small team of about six engineers who did some of the riskiest work at the site, climbing through the crevices of a strange and unstable netherworld, calmly charting its conditions, and returning without complaint after major collapses had occurred.

The engineers finished the initial surveys in a couple of months, which was fast, given the size of their domain—six levels of ten acres each within the foundation hole, and an adjacent two levels of six acres each in the Trade Center complex to the east, all lying in confusion. By mid-

November only one important underground area remained to be explored—a place people called “the final frontier,” located deep under the center of the ruins, at the foot of the former North Tower. It was the main chiller plant, one of the world’s largest air-conditioning facilities—a two-acre chamber three stories high that contained seven interconnected refrigeration units, each the size of a locomotive and capable of holding up to 24,000 pounds of dangerous Freon gas.

Freon is a manufactured product containing chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), and its use has been restricted by international accord because of the damage it does to the atmosphere’s protective ozone layer. The threat it posed at the Trade Center was more immediate, and stemmed from the fact that it is a heavy gas and it aggressively displaces the oxygen in the air that people breathe. With the huge quantities potentially involved here (as much as 168,000 pounds, under pressure, if the tanks remained intact), a sudden leak would fill the voids underground and spread across the surface of the pile, suffocating perhaps hundreds of workers caught out on the rough terrain and unable to move fast. To make matters worse, if the Freon cloud came in contact with open flames, of which there were plenty here, it would turn into airborne forms of hydrochloric

could not gamble with people’s lives. Moreover, there was disturbing news that traces of Freon had been found in the water that was pooling just above bedrock seventy feet down, at the lowest (B-6) basement level of the foundation hole.

Since the water came primarily from the efforts to suppress fire and dust on the surface—from streams being played into the eruptions on the pile—it was possible that the Freon traces had simply been washed from tainted debris. Alternatively, the traces perhaps indicated a leak from one of the auxiliary tanks located in a less heavily damaged structure at the north end of the foundation hole—tanks that would soon be emptied by a specialized crew. But it was possible, too, that the engineers’ speculation had been wrong—that the main chiller plant remained largely intact, and that the Freon inside it was somehow starting to escape. Either way, the time had come to take a look around. In preparation for the effort, additional pumps were hooked up on the B-6 level, and over several days the flood in the foundation hole was drawn as low as it would easily go—to a depth of about one foot. The engineers knew that the route through the ruins would be tight and uncertain. A “spelunking run,” they called it, and because they would go deep, a “B-6 crawl.”

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and hydrofluoric acids and also phosgene gas, related to the mustard gas used during World War I. Then it would go drifting. Evacuation sirens were installed around the edges of the pile, but in tests they often failed. Evacuation maps were printed with elaborate routes and mustering points, but of course they were not read. People accepted the danger. The standard advice, “Just run like hell,” was delivered with a little shrug. Everyone knew that if the Freon came hunting for you at the center of the pile, you would succumb.

So for two months the Freon lurked like a beast inside the ruins, hiding in its den deep among channels that were venting noxious smoke and steam. By mid-November it seemed that the diesel excavators, which were digging in a valley of ruins between the mounds of the Twin Towers, would soon be encroaching on the chiller plant from above. If in the natural confusion of the work one of them tore into a loaded refrigeration unit, or merely damaged a pipe or a valve, the effect could be catastrophic. In private conversation the engineers speculated that the chiller plant had been severely damaged by the North Tower’s collapse, and that most if not all of the Freon had vented immediately into the rising column of smoke and dust. But they did not know, and

I was invited along, as I’d been many times before. The pile that day was burning heavily under a south wind that spread ash and the sweet smell of the ruins far into the city, eliciting complaints. The sky was gray with autumn clouds; the air was soft and cool. Amid the roar of machinery we met at a plywood shack near the southwest corner of the ruins—twenty men in helmets and hardhats and high rubber boots. The shack was a doorway to the underworld. It covered the top of an old stairwell that descended into the ground within the so-called South Projection, one of two protrusions under West Street, where the foundation hole had been extended toward the Hudson River to encompass the PATH tubes. Since September 11 the South Projection stairwell, like that of the North Projection, had provided important access to the ruins below. For the first few weeks it had been choked with rubble, and had required careful negotiation, like a steep and unstable switchback trail. By now, however, it had been cleared, and could be taken without effort, twelve flights down to the abandoned tracks.

At the bottom, in the dungeoned light from an overhead crater nearby, we collected in the mouth of the PATH tube for a brief discussion. The air smelled dank and musty, in a fading combination of train brakes, oil, and steel. Some of

the people were new to the scene: a police rescue team of five men, looking dandyish in their kneepads, carabiners, and helmet lamps, and an equal number of firemen, less proudly dressed, who had recently arrived for the standard one-month rotation. The firemen were young, and visibly more relaxed than the police. Several ventured like sight-seers into the PATH tube, playing the beams of their flashlights across its iron rings, into the green and red puddles of oily fluid, and down the rusting tracks that stretched westward into the blackness under the Hudson River. In about two hours you could walk through the tube to New Jersey and back, if only for the sport. But today the job was serious, with risk involved, and it lay in the other direction, northeast across the complications of the ruined basement and into the unexplored.

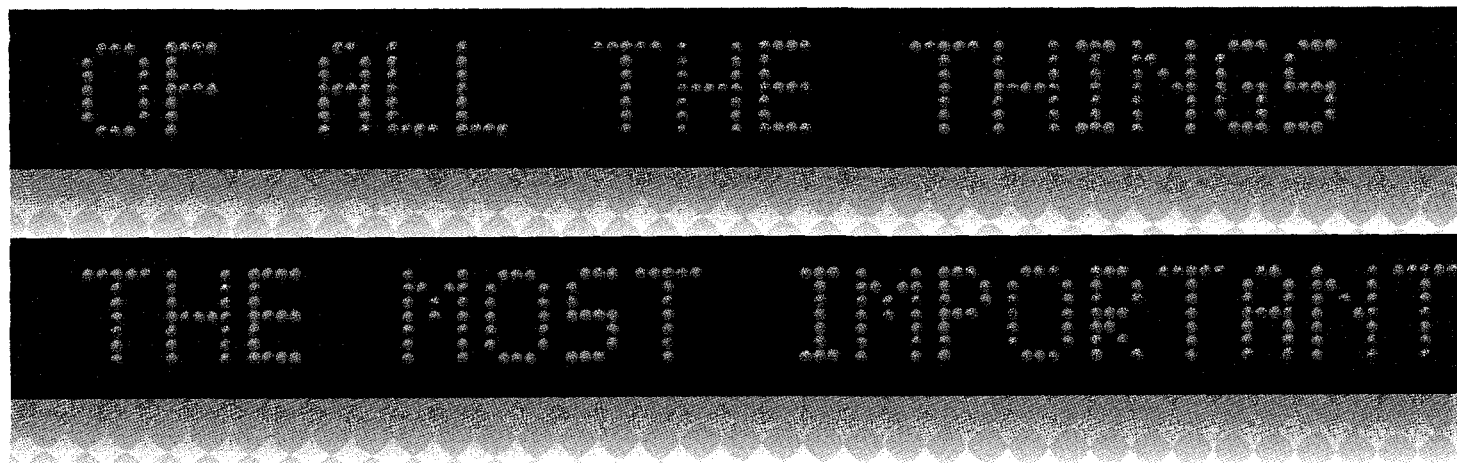
The expedition carried several emergency air packs and an electronic sniffer to warn of low oxygen and the presence of Freon—but none of this would help in a collapse, which the engineers still believed was the greatest danger we faced. It was reassuring, therefore, that the group included underground veterans—indeed, some of the Trade Center’s most experienced men. These were people unheralded on the outside, several of whom in retrospect now stand among the greats in the recovery effort. One was a watchful and laconic fireman named John O’Connell, a specialist in

building collapses, who had served as an example to the crews from the very start, calmly smoking cigars in even the most threatening conditions, and providing people with a necessary model of skepticism in the face of all the hype.

Beside him stood another fireman, whose talents turned out to be even more valuable. He was Sam Melisi, a small and painfully modest Staten Islander, whose gentle and self-effacing manner seemed out of place at first, but stemmed from profoundly altruistic impulses that over time became widely recognized, eventually giving him a moral authority that no one else at the site came close to matching. That authority translated into the power to make suggestions that others were willing to follow. The power surprised and plagued him to the end; he did not think of himself as a leader, and in other circumstances he probably would not have been one. Nominally he was always just a fireman, a collapsed-building specialist like O’Connell, with front-line duties that included assisting on these underground runs. But already by mid-November some people had started calling him “Saint Sam,” as in “Saint Sam the Fireman.” He rose to it uncertainly, but gradually assumed the all-important role of a mediator.

The French flew him to Paris for a day to plant a tree in the Luxembourg Gardens, as if he was just another New York “hero,” good for a photograph and a night out on the

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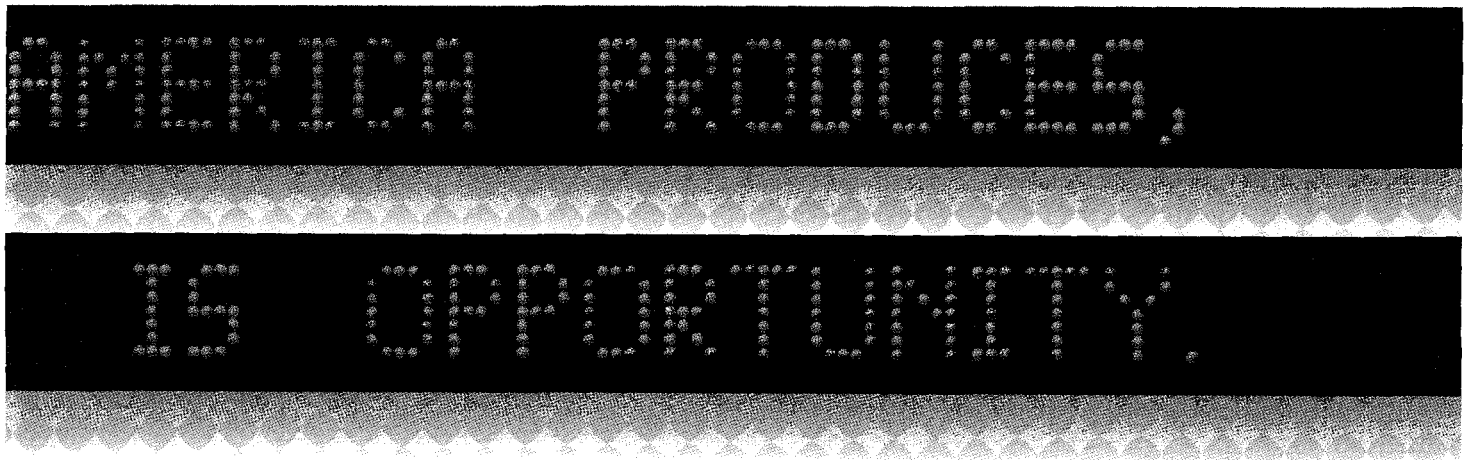
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town; they had the luck of the draw and never knew it. Melisi remained unknown to New York, too, which had nearly as distant a view of the site, and had actually been surprised by the outbreak of fighting there between firemen and the police on November 2—a power struggle that came to the surface after weeks of mounting tensions. Afterward the political operatives at city hall must secretly have believed that they maintained the peace between the multiple opposing forces on the pile, but in truth, if anyone did, it was Sam Melisi. Ultimately this made him enemies as well as friends, primarily among the firemen's widows who grew angry when in the spring it became obvious that so many of their husbands' bodies would never be found. Unwilling to see the search come to an end, some of them began hunting for traitors in their midst—and as often happens, they turned on the mediator. Melisi was tainted by association. But when they began accusing him of betrayal, they could not have been more wrong.

Of all the people setting out now for the chiller plant, twenty men redefined by these ruins, the one who would have the greatest influence on the unfolding story was an obscure engineer, a lifelong New Yorker named Peter Rinaldi. At age fifty-two, Rinaldi was an inconspicuous olive-skinned man with graying hair and a moustache, who observed the world through oversized glasses and had a

quirky way of suddenly raising his eyebrows, not in surprise but as a prompt or in suggestion. He had grown up in the Bronx as the son of a New York cop, had gone to college there, and had married a girl he had met in high school. Though he and his wife had moved to the suburbs of Westchester County to raise their three sons, he had never cut his connection to the city, or quite shed his native accent. For twenty-eight years he had commuted to the World Trade Center, to offices in the North Tower, where he worked for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, deep within its paternal embrace and completely secure in his existence. There was an early warning in the terrorist bombing of 1993, which caught him in an elevator. Nonetheless, he was wholly unprepared for the destruction that followed in 2001.

The Port Authority is as much an empire as an organization—an insular and enormously wealthy bi-state agency, exempted from ordinary governmental constraints, that was created in 1921 to build and manage the area's transportation facilities, and was given the right to finance itself by issuing bonds and collecting its own tolls and taxes. It operates every major airport in the area (Newark, La Guardia, Kennedy, and Teterboro), manages all the ports (including one of the world's largest container facilities, at Newark), runs a busy railroad (PATH), owns New York's commuter-



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bus stations, controls many of the city's lucrative tunnels and bridges (among them the Lincoln and Holland Tunnels and the George Washington Bridge), and even has its own private army—an independent police force 1,300 strong. More to the point, it also built, owned, and until recently operated the World Trade Center, where it maintained its headquarters; on September 11 it occupied space on thirty-eight floors and each of the six subterranean levels. All of that was lost when the buildings collapsed, along with the lives of seventy-five Port Authority employees, some of them maintenance men who could have escaped after the South Tower fell, but went grimly back underground to find their co-workers. It would be hard to overestimate the ensuing sense of exposure and uncertainty for the employees who survived. During the days after the attack, when to New York City officials the Port Authority seemed to have disappeared, it was hunkered down across the river in its New Jersey offices, suffering through a collective emptiness so severe that people themselves felt hollowed out.

Peter Rinaldi felt it too, though he was far away at the time of the attack, vacationing with his wife, Audrey, on the Outer Banks of North Carolina. The North Tower was like a home to him. He'd had a corner office on the seventy-second floor, and a satisfying job there overseeing the engineering for all the Port Authority bridges and tunnels. He especially liked the George Washington Bridge, and had once appeared on the Discovery Channel to praise its resilience. Recently he had found a million dollars in spare funds, and without going through all the usual bureaucratic rituals had spent it on decorating the span with permanent lights. Others in the Port Authority had criticized him afterward for bypassing procedures—but only in private, and as friends. Rinaldi took it in stride, and never felt threatened, because the atmosphere at work was always so stable.

But on the Outer Banks, on television, he watched everything come apart. It took merely two ten-second pulses. Months later he was still struggling to describe the shock. To me he said, "It was surreal. You're on vacation, and you're looking at this, and it's a place where ... I knew all the people there. It's a place you're supposed to go back to work, your office. It's everything you do. You just watch this thing collapse. It was like, you couldn't really believe it, in terms of all this loss. You say, 'That's not really real. This can't be gone.' And then you think, Well, what's going to happen afterward? What are you going to do? How are you going to do this? Where are you going to be? What's going to happen with the agency? How many people were lost? It could have wiped out our whole two thousand people we had in that building. Or the whole organizational structure. The whole center of the PA was in that building."

The whole center of his life. He said little at the time, and spent another day at the beach, but the event had devastated him. His wife told me that he became a man she

had never seen before—preoccupied, passive, withdrawn. Part of it was that he knew so many people who had died, several of whom were close friends; back in New York he went to their wakes and funerals. But another part of it was that he had been stripped of his shelter, irrevocably, and that, as he told me later, he doubted his ability to proceed in a disorderly world.

And then, adding to his uncertainty, having briefly reunited with his old staff at temporary quarters in New Jersey, Rinaldi was reassigned to New York City's recovery team—a small group of men and women who were camped in the kindergarten rooms of Public School 89, near the ruins, and, in the midst of the most disorderly conditions imaginable, were improvising a response. These were primarily Kenneth Holden's people from the Department of Design and Construction. Rinaldi was given the job of supervising the consultants who had been brought in for the specialized belowground engineering. I met him at the start, when he did seem tentative and out of place, and I watched him through three seasons to the end, by which time he had become, both above and below ground, the one man everyone turned to for an opinion.

The attempt on the chiller plant happened about a third of the way through his odyssey. Rinaldi was nominally in charge, but he neither gave commands nor asserted himself by taking the lead. I think by then he had already discerned what some others never did—that the imposition of conventional order on these ruins was a formalism or a fiction, and unnecessary. Progress was made in the privacy of a thousand moments on loose, broad fronts, by individuals looking after themselves and generally operating alone. This was how we turned now and drifted toward the jumping-off point for the unknown, twenty men, each picking his path.

Under the crater and by the light of the sky far above, Rinaldi and I paused by a pile of rubble that we had occasionally crossed before, and we discussed the news that a fireman's body had recently been found there, buried under a thin layer of dust and debris. It seemed strange that for two months neither we nor anyone else had noticed him. Rinaldi mentioned that in the chiller plant—should we find a way to it—we might encounter the body of a certain Port Authority employee, a man who was believed to have sheltered there. So be it. After so many other encounters at the site, the prospect elicited neither hope nor horror. People grow used to the dead.

Beyond the crater our route was lit by a string of utility lamps installed for the pump crews that had been drawing down the basement flood. We gathered where the pumps were running, on a concrete platform above an area of black water. John O'Connell, in a wide-brimmed fire helmet, slouched by a steel column, smoking a cigar and looking typically unimpressed. The police seemed to think that their

sergeant was in charge, and apparently the sergeant did too. He announced that he would be probing the water with a steel pipe, and he advised everyone to stay in line close behind him. No one quite looked at him, or responded. The sergeant warned about ten-foot sumps now hidden within the flood, into which a person could disappear and drown. Sam Melisi checked a map for the specific locations, which indeed were shown near the chiller plant. Rinaldi mentioned our schedule. One by one we stepped off into the flood, and with flashlight beams probing the huge forms of ruined structures, we waded in a single long file into the darkness.

The sergeant at the lead soon gave up trying to sweep water with his pipe and began to use it as a crutch to steady himself as we moved across submerged debris. Each of us was feeling his own way, not walking so much as sliding forward experimentally, sloshing through the opaque water and taking care not to trip over fixed objects or to step heavily on the looseness underfoot. It was clear that anyone falling here risked injury and, if cut, a serious infection. Nonetheless, our progress was fast, and it soon reduced the view of the pumping platform behind to a distant light, and then to nothing at all. We moved across a cavern bordered

a confusion of rubble slopes that obscured the blackness beyond, where an access route might possibly be found. The place looked like a trap, and dangerous as hell. The police apparently thought so too; they bunched on the stairway and tested their radio link.

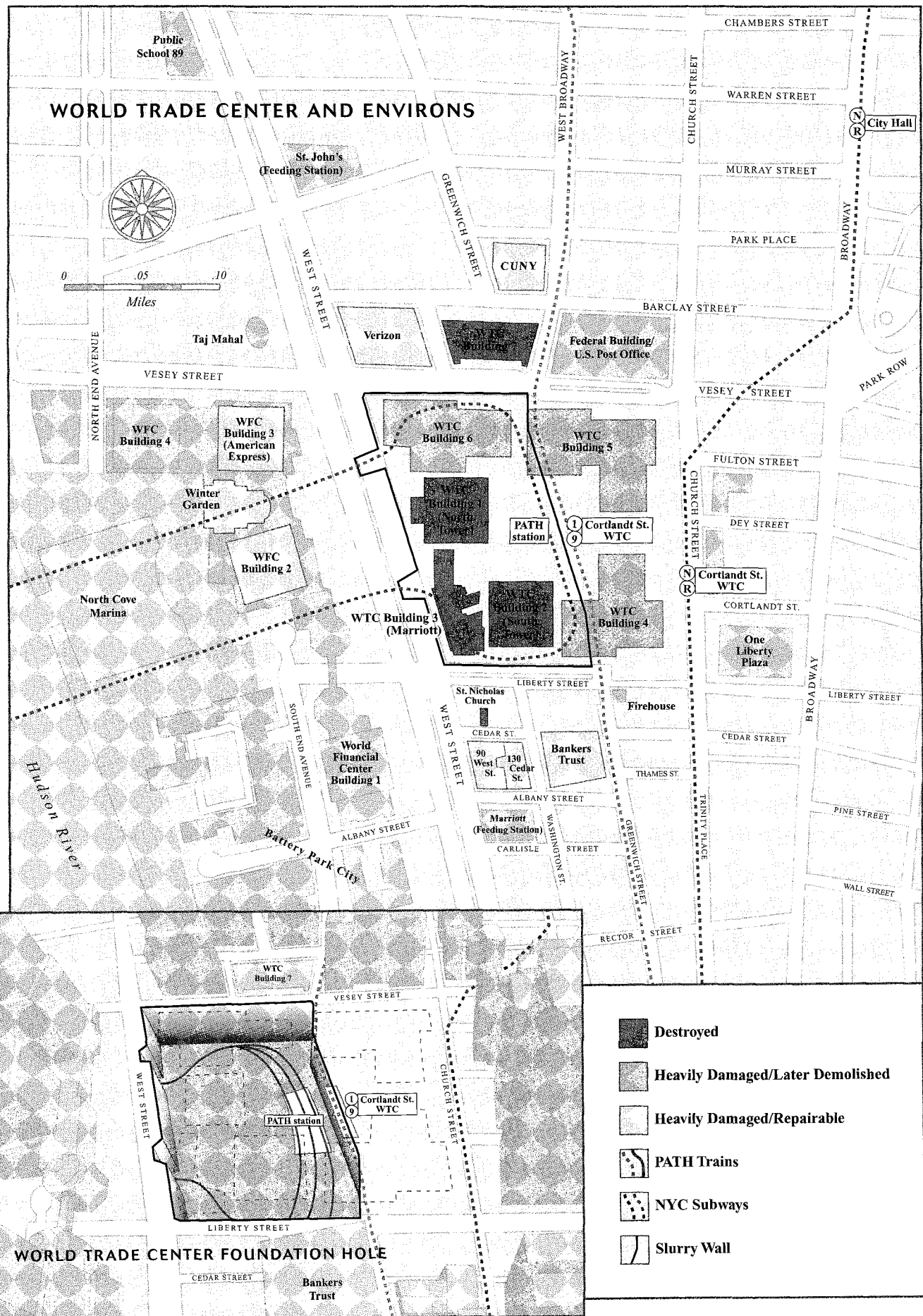
Rinaldi discussed the situation with a couple of Trade Center facilities men who had come along because of their expert memories of the buildings. Given the extent of the destruction that clearly lay ahead, it seemed unlikely that any of the chiller plant could have survived. In that sense, the work here might already have been accomplished—and there was certainly reason to be skeptical about the benefits of moving forward. At the same time, if for no other reason than the draw of the unknown, Rinaldi was obviously unwilling to retreat. Within the private culture of the Trade Center underground this was understood without explanation: it was simply very difficult to turn away from space that remained unexplored. Briefly, therefore, we were at an impasse. But then one of the engineers took matters into his own hands, and without saying a word descended the last steps into the water and set out alone. The police had given up any pretense of command. No one called the engineer back. Rinaldi watched him for a while—a tall, thin silhouette

We had progressed deep into the pile. The ruins were closing in oppressively, with crazily angled slabs tilting down into the waters ahead amid a confusion of rubble slopes that obscured the blackness beyond. The place looked like a trap, and dangerous as hell.

by massive collapses and traversed by man-sized pipes, one of which, labeled “River Water,” and known to be closed off, was the main intake line for the chiller plant. Whether because of nearby fire or ongoing collapses, the air turned thick with dust. With the exception of the ever dismissive John O’Connell, we donned our respirators, limiting conversation. The cop with the electronic sniffer was clearly concerned, and was checking the indicators so often that he was falling behind. He lifted his mask and called, “O₂’s okay! All gasses okay!” We slowed to let him catch up. The darkness grew loud with the sound of falling water, which turned out to be bands of a mysterious subterranean rain—too heavy to result from the firefighting on the surface—falling from the confusion of ruin overhead. We moved through the rain, and fifty yards farther on climbed onto the dry ground of a catwalk built above an area of heavy machinery. We paused where the catwalk ended, in lattice-work stairs leading down into the floodwater on the far side. By then we had progressed deep into the pile, and by ordinary measures were only a short distance from the main chiller plant. There was still no indication of Freon. The ruins, however, were closing in oppressively, with crazily angled slabs tilting down into the waters ahead amid

familiar to us all, pushing steadily into the ruins—and then he and I and most of the group set out too.

The tall, thin silhouette belonged to a man already famous for his independence. He was Richard Garlock, age thirty-three, a boyish-looking structural specialist who worked for the Trade Center’s original designer (Leslie E. Robertson, the “engineer of record”) in a small company called LERA, which for thirty years had served as the main Trade Center consultant to the Port Authority, and which had its offices nearby. LERA was known at the site less for its history than for its current feeling of having been marginalized during the cleanup efforts under way. Certainly it had responded valiantly to the attacks of September 11: Garlock and others from the firm were running toward the Trade Center to provide a structural assessment of the North Tower’s wounds when the second airplane came in and hit the South Tower. They had returned to their offices and were volunteering their expertise to the fire department when the towers collapsed. Their firm had taken the lead after the terrorist bombing in 1993, and it was only natural to assume it would do the same now. Instead, when they made the offer to help, they found that LERA had been relegated to a minor role—to be called on by other consultants as



JEFFREY L. WARD

needed. Understandably, they took this as an insult and an injustice. I repeated their tale of woe one evening to Audrey Rinaldi, who had arrived for dinner downtown from her job as a nurse and hospital administrator in the Bronx. She said jokingly, "You know, engineers are humans too," as if the point could be debated. But there was always plenty of proof at the Trade Center site.

The prime consultant on the job was a large and well connected New York firm called Thornton-Tomasetti—the engineers of the Petronas Towers, in Kuala Lumpur, and of the United Airlines terminal in Chicago, among other monumental structures. With its 400 employees and enormous institutional expertise, Thornton-Tomasetti could have ignored LERA's feelings entirely but for one important catch: since most of the complex's technical drawings had been stored (and thus destroyed) within the North Tower, LERA had the only complete and readily available set of the original plans—and by the way, it wasn't going just to hand them over. In fairness, LERA's position probably had as much to do with self-protection as with pique. The firm was potentially exposed to the waves of lawsuits already coming into view, and it needed to maintain some sort of control. Understandably, it wanted to make its own detailed assessments of the ruins. People accepted this, however grudgingly. LERA had been smart if not supple; it had used the technical drawings adroitly, and eventually found a place at the very center of the operation. On all the important surveys now, including this chiller-plant run, Garlock was the man holding the blueprints. And having fought so hard to be here, he wasn't about to retreat or to leave these ruins unexplored.

Actually, Garlock was fearless anyway. He was a moralist at times, but an affable fellow too, with a distracted graduate-student manner that contrasted pleasantly with the harshness of the surroundings. I found it interesting to watch him work—all the more so after I realized that he was not engaged in some sort of geekish theater (my first assumption) but was genuinely absorbed by the minutiae of even the most obscure corners of the ruins. When I described his enthusiasm to Audrey Rinaldi, who had taken it upon herself to explain engineers' personalities to me, she acted unsurprised.

I said, "But honestly, when you're deep underground and everything is fine, just how fascinating can it be that this is Panel D-15 or A-5?"

She looked at me pityingly, as if she hated to shatter my illusions. She said, "I keep telling you ..."

But Garlock seemed unusual even to the other engineers. Some of them started calling him "Planet Garlock," as if he had descended from a faraway place. He would go wandering off through the subterranean ruins, gazing intently through small spectacles at the columns and beams, often with the hint of a quizzical smile, making notations on his cherished blueprints, with apparently only a vague awareness of the

danger signs around him—the jolt of a collapse far below, the rattle of cascading debris, the ominous groaning of weakened structures overhead, or, in the early days, the streams of molten metal that leaked from the hot cores and flowed down broken walls inside the foundation hole. The others would exchange looks and ask Garlock to hurry. In my experience he never did. He was interested in every part of the ruins, but really relished the underground.

The truth is, we all liked it there, if not to the degree that Garlock did. The underground was the Trade Center's inner realm, the destination at the end of a progression that with each step took people closer to the heart of the ruins: across the perimeter, to the edge of the pile, onto its surface, and then down into its insides. It was also simply an intriguing place to be, and less macabre than outsiders supposed. The dead lay nearby, but for the most part they were buried in the inaccessible cores—debris so tightly compressed that even the rats, said to be arriving from all over downtown, were unable to burrow in (or so we told ourselves). The cores were shaped like inverted mountains, or cones, that grew narrower with depth. They filled the towers' footprints to bedrock and occupied the center and south end of the foundation hole. They were bounded by looser ruins and basement structures in an arc from west through north to east. And it was among those looser ruins, after Garlock spurred us into motion, that we continued now to explore.

Garlock roamed south into the darkness among the piles of debris. Others roamed north. Rinaldi and I moved slowly to the east. In an area of mountainous collapses we came eventually to another catwalk, which we climbed until it ended in a slope of loose rubble. There was nothing but blackness behind and ruin ahead, and no sign or sound of the others. Blocks of concrete the size of cars hung over our heads, one dangling on rebar.

Through the respirator mask I asked Rinaldi, "How stable do you think that is?"

He said, "It's not."

I asked, "Have you noticed how guys will pretend not to notice?"

He said, "Yeah," and we both laughed. But we knew that if it hadn't fallen yet, it wouldn't fall now.

Almost by chance then Rinaldi's light picked out a man-sized hole in the debris slope, above us and to one side, and through it, faintly illuminated, the form of a rounded mass of steel. It was heavy equipment of some kind—and given its location, it had to be inside the main chiller plant. Rinaldi crawled up and in, spilling dust and broken concrete down the slope, and I followed close behind. The space in which we found ourselves gave the impression of an oversized version of a ship's engine room, but reduced and hemmed in by massive collapses, and lying in complete ruin. There was no sign of the missing Port Authority man and, though we lifted our masks to check, no smell of his death. We

To my Children - David, Diana, Michael,
We're running out of tomorrows. I'm so proud of you!
I always loved you and always will.
Goodbye my darlings.
Mom

Dearest Jon,
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out of 20 or 30 more years together. Remember
the fun we had every year at the lake. I will
ALWAYS love and treasure you.
Linda

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squeezed between a partially crushed tank and its battered pumps, and were barred from further progress by a wall of broken slabs and twisted steel. After a while one of the Trade Center facilities men arrived, followed later by Garlock and the young fire crew. For no good reason one of the firemen tried to climb a twenty-foot chimney in the unstable rubble, and he had to be pulled back and told to calm down. No one thought much about it, because so many of the firemen were emotional, especially when they were new. Rinaldi took pictures of the ruins. The damage was even worse than the engineers had expected it to be, and it offered the first hard evidence of a fact that was eventually verified during the excavation from the surface—that the Freon had vented, and the beast at the center of the pile was a myth.

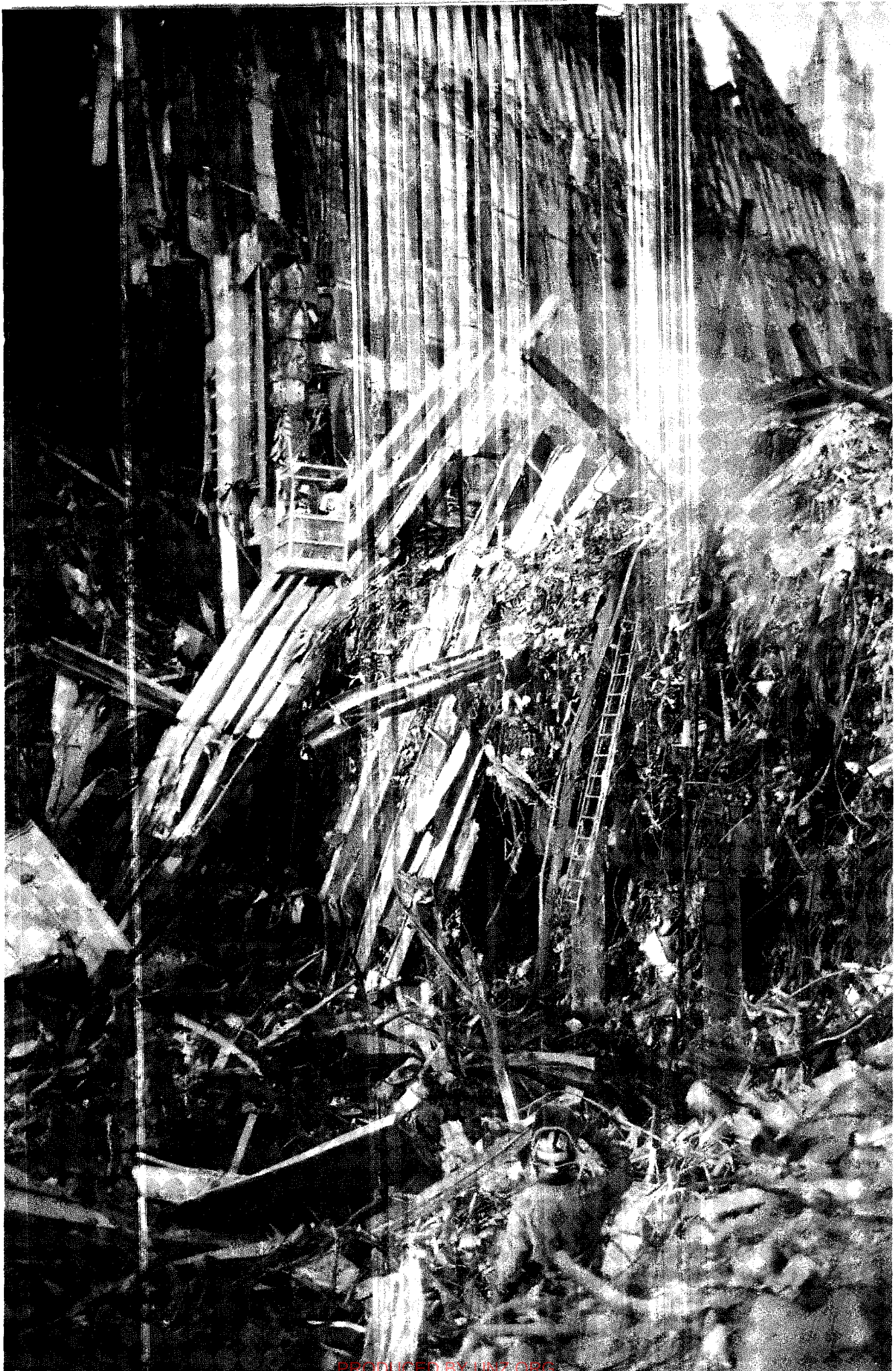
At its most chaotic the underground was like the abstract netherworld we encountered during the chiller-plant run—as shredded as the surface of the pile, yet without the organizing principle of the sky. But that was the extreme. Much of the underground was intuitively easy to understand. It consisted of parking garages, often in some stage of collapse, where more than a thousand cars now stood abandoned and covered with the standard gray concrete dust. A disproportionate number of the cars were BMWs, Jaguars, Lexuses, and the like—indicating, if nothing else, the preponderance of a certain culture that had thrived here. Although a few seemed strangely untouched, most were crushed, sliced, blasted, or burned. Along the north side, where the basement structure remained strong and intact (and was ultimately preserved), the fire had been so intense in places that it had consumed the tires and interiors, and had left hulks sitting on axles above hardened pools of aluminum wheels. Three presidential limousines stood in there too, but they were locked away, and remained unscathed. When access was opened, the Secret Service rushed in and with a great show of secrecy loaded the limousines onto flatbed trucks, covered them with tarps, and hauled them back to Washington.

There was a romantic idea, widespread at first, that the Trade Center underground would contain wonderful and varied treasures—but it never quite panned out. Along the north side before the collapses there were firing ranges and gun rooms for various police agencies, and vaults containing confiscated narcotics and cigarettes, and there was a collection of artifacts from a Colonial-era African-American burial ground, but aside from the garages and the PATH facilities, the basements consisted for the most part of utility spaces and storage rooms in which the things that were kept were basement things—tools, wire spools, spare chairs and partitions, and, in one particularly claustrophobic corner, glossy brochures from the former 107th-floor observation deck of the South Tower. Out beyond the foundation hole, in the burned-through remains of

Building Five, a Citibank vault was stacked with a fortune in bundled currency—which, however, had been baked and turned to ash. Nearby, a vault left open at Morgan Stanley turned out to be almost as disappointing. It contained \$2.7 billion, but in financial certificates that would have been nearly impossible for a thief to translate into cash. A Brinks car reportedly holding \$14 million was stuck in the ruins for a few weeks, adding a nice touch to the underground, until Brinks was able to remove it. The newspapers reported the loss of government safes containing top-secret documents, for what that was worth. They also reported the loss of important legal documents, news of which caused no stir.

Ultimately, only one Trade Center treasure was worthy of the name. It was a hoard of gold and silver ingots, valued at about \$250 million, that filled a two-story vault in the remnants of an old railroad station under the ruins of Building Four. A quarter of a billion dollars' worth of gold and silver turns out to be a lot of ingots—more than 30,000 in this case. The ingots weighed up to seventy pounds each, and were stacked on wooden pallets that could be moved within the vault by forklift and internal elevator. Their total weight was 1.9 million pounds. The vault belonged to the Bank of Nova Scotia. The bank held the treasure to legitimize trading in the precious-metals market. In practice it was expected that the metal would remain in the vault, even as it was bought and sold in various forms. There were guards to make sure that nothing went wrong with the stock. It never did. Even after the attacks of September 11 security was not a worry, because the guards had bolted the door before fleeing, and mounds of heavy debris blocked any conceivable access. The treasure lay locked in a vault inside a vault. At least that was the thinking.

But when, at the end of October, a pathway was finally cleared, down a truck ramp from the north and through an old railroad tunnel, the bank's initial entry team discovered that others had been there before, attempting to pry open the vault's door and to cut in from above, in both cases unsuccessfully. It was never clear who the intruders were, where they had come from, or how they had proposed to get away through these ruins with more than just a few ingots. However, if the unbuilding of the World Trade Center had already shown one thing, it was that the workers were resourceful. The bank hurriedly organized a convoy of armored trucks and over the course of several days, amid another display of pomp and secrecy, moved the gold and silver out. It took 120 trips. No one was supposed to know that the destination was the Brooklyn Navy Yard, but everyone did. Over the weekend workers made a point of getting past the security detail—cops in bulletproof vests, cradling riot guns—and down into the vault to watch the treasure disappear. It was an innocent distraction. The vault inside was not merely undamaged but well lit and



pristine. For one weekend it served the underground as a tourist destination.

But the most popular place down there was always the two-story PATH station, which stretched along the eastern wall at the deepest levels of the foundation hole, and was the most public of the Trade Center spaces that remained at least partially intact. Although it had suffered heavily, and continued to collapse throughout the fall and winter, it was considered to be relatively safe. In the last days of September, Peter Rinaldi pioneered the early route in, down the North Projection to the PATH tube and then by rubber raft along the heavily flooded tracks, a River Styx flowing deep under the ruins of Building Six. It was Rinaldi's first underground exploration. Richard Garlock went along, as did two other young engineers, who worked for the famous foundation firm Mueser Rutledge and played important roles at the site—a huge and garrulous man of Ecuadorian origin named Pablo Lopez, who had attended Manhattan College, in the Bronx, on scholarship and still lived in the poor Hispanic neighborhood where he was raised; and his wry, cerebral partner, an ex-carpenter and Columbia graduate named Andrew Pontecorvo, who was small by comparison and did some tough duty crawling into tight spaces. They were accompanied by a typical phalanx of firemen and cops.

They had three rafts, two of which were leaking air and on a couple of occasions had to be reinflated. The men pushed and paddled the rafts for forty minutes up the railway, eventually through widening spaces as the tracks branched into the PATH station. The water came up almost to the level of the station platforms, which remained dry. The men disembarked, grounded the rafts, and began to explore. Rinaldi was the one most familiar with the place, but he moved through it as if in a dream, noticing the complete silence and the little clouds of dust that rose in slow motion with every step he took. The darkness was so deep that it seemed to defeat his flashlight beam. A ghostly train stood there in an image of abandonment—the first cars crushed under heavy slabs, the remaining ones intact but empty, with their doors ajar. Rinaldi knew already that no one had been inside on September 11—the train had been sitting idle in the station all morning, and it had simply remained. Two other trains, full of passengers, had left New Jersey and were bound for New York when word of the first attack came. In one of the more elegant moves of the morning they did not stop but with typical Port Authority aplomb continued to roll smoothly through the Trade Center underground and, without rushing, slipped back beneath the Hudson to safety.

Rinaldi had the wit to appreciate that sort of thing, but he wasn't in the mood for it now. Others on the team had started into the technical work of the survey—Garlock with his close-up inspections, Lopez and Pontecorvo with more distant views—that ultimately, after many more surveys,

would result in a decision to restore PATH service quickly and reuse this station while a new permanent one was built. But that, of course, was the future, and for now Rinaldi was thinking more about the past. He climbed a dormant escalator to the station's upper level, and for old times' sake continued to take in the sights: the melted plastic signs, the pay phones on pedestals, the turnstiles, the candy kiosk still offering sweets, and then the part of the station that became a photographed favorite—the prominent Commuter Bar, with its bottles of booze, its racks of inverted glasses overhead, its open Heinekens on the counter. I could never really appreciate that place, which to me suggested the style in which too many people here must have lived—stacked in their fluorescent-lit towers, removed from the city outside, and wanting to drink in the morning. Rinaldi himself was not much of a drinker, though he liked a good Chianti with dinner. But during another survey of the PATH station, when I mentioned my dislike of the Commuter Bar scene, he grew upset and said he disagreed, maybe because he still thought of all these ruins in some way as his home.

Rinaldi was human but also always an engineer: even during the worst moments of September 11 he continued to think analytically about the buildings. He was two days into the vacation on the Outer Banks, having breakfast with Audrey and friends, when his grown son called from Connecticut and said, "Hey, Dad. A plane just hit the World Trade Center." It had happened at 8:46, just a few minutes earlier. Rinaldi turned on the television and saw the first pictures: it was the North Tower that had taken the hit, high on its north face and apparently well above the engineering quarters on the seventy-second floor, where Rinaldi's staff was already at work. From the quantity of black smoke pouring out, Rinaldi realized that a major fire had erupted. Television reported that the airplane was believed to be small, possibly a commuter airliner. But Rinaldi knew the building's true dimensions, and he was not fooled by television's miniaturization. He said, "Boy, that's pretty large damage for a small plane." The entry wound seemed to stretch nearly the width of the North Tower's 209-foot face, and against that scale formed the head-on silhouette of a very large airplane, banked to the left. Later, when it became known that the airplane was a Boeing 767, it was easy to discern even the outline of its low-slung twin jet engines. Some people were reminded of the perfect holes left in walls and clouds in cartoons. Rinaldi was more practical. He interpreted the tightness of the gash's pattern as a sign of the structure's admirable redundancies: the impact had severed much of the North Tower's all-important exoskeleton, the closely spaced steel columns that shared with an internal elevator core the work of supporting the building's weight, and yet there was no sign of further unraveling. Rinaldi thought about the weather, which was

bright and clear, and he wondered how any pilot on such a morning could have made such a mistake.

But then, at 9:03, the second 767 came in fast from the south and, hooking a hard left turn, slammed into the South Tower. It hit lower than the first one had, but with much the same effect. Rinaldi saw the impact, the fireball, and the ensuing flames. One of the friends cried out, "My God, we're under attack!" It was true enough, but Rinaldi was concentrating on the immediate practicalities. He said, "They'll be evacuating down through the stairwells, and then they'll have to put these fires out." And that was true too. Rinaldi knew about the improvements that had been made in the stairwells since the terrorist bombing of February 1993, primarily in ventilation and emergency lighting, and he trusted that his staff in the North Tower would be able to reach the street from the seventy-second floor in about fifty minutes. If they had left the offices immediately, they would be almost halfway down by now, mixed into the crowds going steadily around and around, and probably starting to encounter firemen moving up to fight the flames. Even if they were descending more slowly, or for some reason had lingered in the office, there was probably no reason to worry about their safety. Rinaldi himself had needed five

than a thousand pounds of TNT, detonated by a timer just after midday in a yellow Ford Econoline van parked on the B-2 level of the underground garage, near the foot of the North Tower. It blew a crater through all six levels of the basement structure, rupturing the surface of the Trade Center's open-air plaza, destroying a hotel meeting room, and disabling the complex's "communications center," while also blasting downward through the stacked garages, lighting cars on fire, and dropping slabs into the chiller plant, causing peripheral damage. One of the people killed was a maintenance man who had placed his desk in an alcove in the North Tower's exterior foundation structure. He was handling paperwork there when the floor dropped out beneath his chair. For weeks afterward the desk remained exactly as he had left it, cluttered with his work but perched impossibly on a steel spandrel high above the crater, as if maybe a crane operator with a dark sense of humor had put it there.

Rinaldi was late for lunch that day, and he was riding an elevator from his offices to the Port Authority cafeteria, on the forty-third floor, when mysteriously the elevator stopped. There were nine passengers aboard, including several other Port Authority engineers who knew the building well. Be-

Much of the underground consisted of parking garages, often in some stage of collapse, where more than 1,000 cars now stood abandoned. A disproportionate number were BMWs, Jaguars, Lexuses—indicating the preponderance of a certain culture that had thrived here.

hours to escape the building when he'd been stranded there in 1993—and though today's attack was clearly more severe, this time the fire was located higher than the engineering offices, and the smoke was rising away. Rinaldi was of course horrified by the scenes unfolding above the impact zones, where people had broken out the windows, and some were clinging to the outside and jumping and falling away. But it can be understood if he reacted to these first minutes of the disaster like an old Port Authority hand with more confidence in procedure than in initiative and speed.

He was not the only one. The memory of the 1993 bombing turned out to be a trap for many people on September 11, because it boiled down to the fact that though six people had died, the buildings had survived. The Fire Department was particularly proud of its reaction, which it promoted within the ranks as an important success story. Until September 11 it was the largest operation in the department's history—a sixteen-alarm response that initially occupied nearly half the force, and engaged specialized crews (which included John O'Connell and Sam Melisi) for twenty-eight days afterward. As is well known, the bomb was set by Islamic militants, who were easily caught and convicted. It was a powerful device, the equivalent of more

cause elevator failures were not uncommon at the Trade Center, no one seemed frightened at first. The standard procedure was to push the red emergency call button; someone in the communications center would answer, and then find a way to work the elevator down, or send a rescue crew. This time, however, all that came back was a taped response, a voice repeating, *Your call has been registered—we will get back to you in a minute. Your call has been registered—we will get back to you in a minute.* During the nightmarish events that followed, the message played on for at least an hour, defeating one man's attempt to silence it with a bundled coat and adding a surreal quality to the experience—something like being trapped and tortured inside a voice-mail machine.

For a while the elevator was well lit. The engineers analyzed the problem, as engineers like to do. When a thin, acrid smoke began to filter in, they discussed the possibility that an elevator motor had shorted and burned; when the smoke grew thicker, they agreed that something more serious had occurred. Then the lights went out, and a dim emergency illumination automatically switched on. The smoke coming in turned dark brown and grew so heavy that visibility within the elevator cab became limited, and people began to cough and choke. Rinaldi pried the door open a

crack and was faced with the close, solid wall of the elevator shaft. More smoke poured in through the opening. They had been trapped for about twenty minutes now, and their situation was suddenly desperate. People reacted in different ways. The only woman crouched silent in a corner as if she had gone into shock.

One of the men grew hysterical, presumably because he was not an engineer. When I asked Rinaldi about it later, he said, "Yeah, we had a guy who was kind of emotional."

I said, "Crying?"

"Hyper and screaming and kind of upset."

The others ignored him, and he finally quieted down.

As for his own predicament, Rinaldi thought, "This is real." He was not afraid to die so much as worried about abandoning his wife and children. He locked eyes with an old friend named Frank Lombardi, a balding, soft-spoken man who at that time was the Port Authority's second-ranking engineer, and had his own family to leave behind. They exchanged little nods, acknowledging the danger they were in.

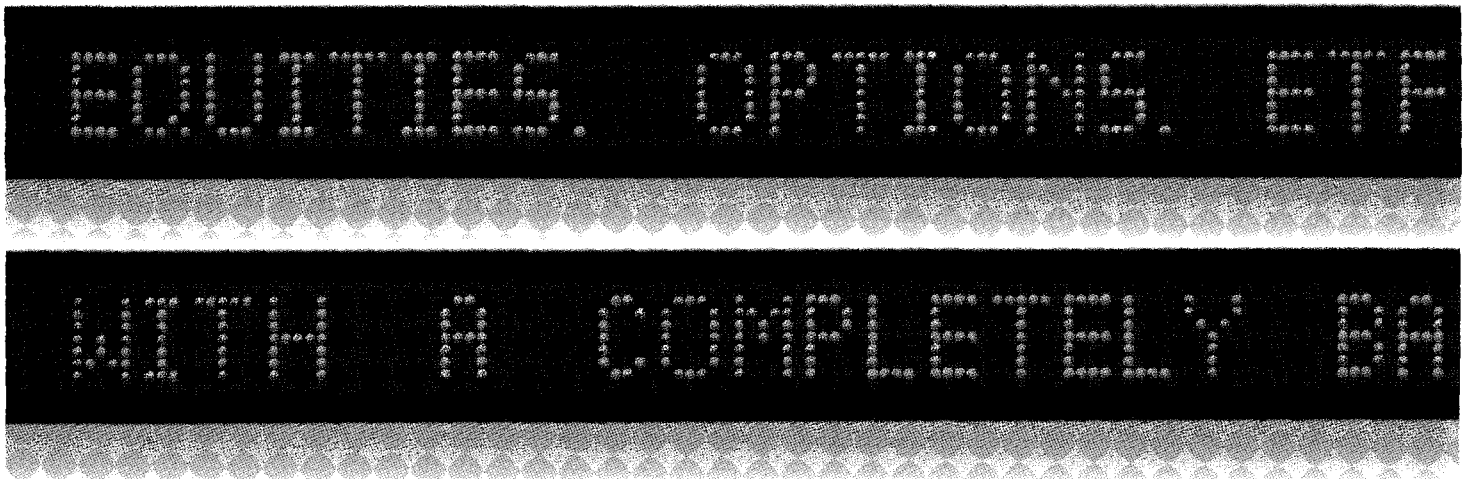
It was essential that they find fresh air, and soon. A lawyer named Rich Williams took off his undershirt and tore it into strips for people to tie around their noses and mouths. In desperation they pried the doors fully open. The wall that faced them was made of fire-resistant gyp-

sum board two inches thick. Rinaldi, Lombardi, and Williams formed a chorus line and tried repeatedly to kick a hole through it—one, two, three!—but the wall merely flexed. Then Rinaldi remembered the wall work he had done at home, and suggested that if they scored the surface, they might be able to get the wall to break. He took out his keys and immediately started scraping. Others crowded forward to join him. Using a key ring, one of them managed to unscrew a metal access plate that could serve as a chopping tool. The emergency lighting failed, and they continued to work under the green glow from a couple of electronic beepers. Eventually they dug all the way through, breaking a small hole into what seemed by feel to be an area of pipes. Fresh air came flooding in, diminishing the smoke inside.

They rested, and after a while returned to their habitual deliberations. A Port Authority engineer suggested that the fire had been small and localized, and probably electrical. He was another one of those good company men with faith in procedures. He said, "Someone will eventually find us."

In retrospect it seems significant that the counter-argument, which was essentially for improvisation, was made by Rinaldi. He said, "No. Listen to the silence. There's not a sound in the building. There's no noise. Nothing. No

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one. You don't hear a thing. No one is here in the building. This had to be larger than just a small electrical fire. No one is going to come and get us. No one is here. The building is evacuated, and they don't know where we are."

After further discussion the engineers agreed that it made sense to enlarge the hole and try to crawl through. The work was done again in nearly total darkness, and it was slow. Rich Williams took the lead. Finally he was able to reach across the pipes, break through a thin wall, and get his hand into a new space. He said, "I can feel this smooth, shiny surface."

One of the engineers said, "Maybe it's a bathroom. Does it feel like tile?"

Williams said, "Yes. It feels like it could be tile." Then he said, "Wait a minute. I have something else." He edged a little farther forward, reached down to grab something, and slid back into the elevator waving a disposable toilet-seat cover. It was a good moment. Nearly everyone laughed. As it turned out, they had dug through the back wall of a toilet stall in the bathroom of the law offices of the Brown & Root Corporation, on the fifty-eighth floor. Williams was the first to go all the way through. "I made it through," he said.

Rinaldi said, "Can you see light? Can you see a way out?"

Williams answered, "I don't know."

Rinaldi went through next, and dropped to the floor of

the stall. He found the bathroom door and emerged into the deserted Brown & Root offices, where he went to a window to look outside. It was a gray winter day, not yet four o'clock in the afternoon, with a light snow falling. Far below, on West Street, stood a jam of emergency vehicles with flashing lights. There was no sign of fire. He returned to the bathroom, and he and Rich Williams helped the others as, one by one, they squirmed through the wall and, using the toilet as a step, escaped from captivity. After more than three hours in the elevator, all of them were filthy with soot and sweat, and coughing violently. They assembled in the office and began a long descent through pitch-black stairwells to the street. Like many of the survivors of 1993, they navigated in the darkness by linking hands, counting the steps, and talking themselves across the stairway landings. It was an uncertain and slow escape, nearly two hours long. But of course ultimately it succeeded.

Eight years later, on September 11, Rinaldi's memory of success informed his reactions during the first hour of the unfolding events, even after the second airplane struck and he knew that the Trade Center was under attack. His confidence was widely shared within the towers themselves, where people on the lower floors were isolated by the size of the structures from the horror overhead. Most knew less than Rinaldi did about what was happening,



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because of course they were not watching television. More than 15,000 walked out safely, in stairwells that were well lit and smoke-free. In 1993 the mood of the crowd inside the stairwells had been confused and fearful. This time there was little of that. Indeed, the mood was rather too restrained. In the South Tower, before it was struck, a Port Authority man made an announcement on the public-address system that the problem was contained to the North Tower, and that people could return to their offices—this despite the fact that jumpers could be seen falling into the plaza just outside. Most people ignored him. But in both towers a strange, Orwellian calm prevailed. People carried their morning coffee into the stairwells. They were not supposed to talk, and generally they did not. Those who tried to move fast or get ahead were reprimanded. But most were well behaved. They stayed obediently in lines to one side, leaving open lanes for the firemen to climb. Those who later believed that they had seen looks of knowing self-sacrifice in the firemen's eyes were understandably confusing the chronology of events. The looks in the firemen's eyes came from the extreme fatigue of having to hump heavy loads up so many stairs, as well as from the anxiety of moving into battle—in this case against a dangerous fire that would have to be fought from below. The firemen remembered the successes of 1993 as clearly as anyone, and they were no more prescient than others. But then, at 9:59 A.M., the South Tower made a noise variously heard as a roar, a growl, or distant thunder.

By September of 2001 Rinaldi's soft-spoken friend Frank Lombardi had risen to become the Port Authority's chief engineer—an exalted position with ties to monumental public projects of the twentieth century, not the least of which was the World Trade Center itself. Lombardi's office was grand. It occupied the southwest corner of the North Tower's seventy-second floor, and looked out over New York Harbor to the flats of Staten Island and New Jersey. As elsewhere in the towers, the view was restricted because the windows were only twenty-two inches wide and inset one foot from the exterior—an unfortunate consequence of the close spacing of the external columns and also, apparently, of the discomfort that the principal architect, Minoru Yamasaki, felt with wide-open perspectives from such heights. Nonetheless, for a busy man like Lombardi the view was good enough. It was a backdrop, and he didn't spend a lot of time looking outside.

In any case, the first airplane came in high and from the other direction—down the Hudson from the north, down Manhattan, and into the North Tower between the ninety-fourth and ninety-eighth floors. It blew fuel and debris straight through the building. Lombardi was at his desk. He heard nothing, but he felt the tower sway, and he saw people in the hallway go airborne before they fell. Lombardi's first thought was that New York was experiencing an earthquake.

But then, just outside his window, he saw a huge ball of fire followed by a rain of vapor and white paper, and he realized that the building had been hit—though he assumed on the south face, and probably by accident. He went out to check on his staff. He told people to go to the stairwells and leave. Most of them did. He went back into his office and stared at the papers fluttering down, noticing how slowly some were falling, and how close to the window. From the quantity he realized that the building had been badly breached. Right away he got three phone calls. The first was from his secretary's husband, who was in New Jersey, and had either seen or heard of trouble. Lombardi said, "She's fine. She's on her way down." The second was from the friend of a friend, who asked, "Is he okay?" Lombardi said, "Yes. He's on the way down." The third was from a contractor, who said, "Frank, do you need help?"

Lombardi wasn't sure. He said, "What happened?"

"I don't know, but something hit you."

"I know, but what?"

The contractor said, "I don't know."

It never crossed their minds to consider a hijacked airliner on a suicide flight. Lombardi wanted to verify that the seventy-second floor had been evacuated. With a couple of colleagues he searched the one acre of floor space, mostly cubicles. It was empty. But when they went to the stairwell to leave, they heard shouting behind an elevator door. Two men were trapped in the cab. Lombardi did not think they were in immediate danger, but having gone through his own elevator ordeal in 1993, he wasn't about to abandon them. The door was jammed, and required about twenty minutes to pry open. During that time one of Lombardi's colleagues was back in his office, getting tools, when his telephone rang. The man on the line said, "You guys are still up in Tower One? Don't you realize that Tower Two was hit?" In annoyance, Lombardi's colleague said, "Will you please stop spreading rumors?" and hung up. It seems surprising now. These were alert people, but they were confused by their proximity to an event too large to imagine.

Lombardi descended the stairwells of the North Tower to the plaza level, where he looked out and saw body parts scattered across the concrete. He went down another level, where all around him crowds were evacuating into West Street. But he was the chief engineer, and he felt a duty to respond—though how and to what he still had no idea. Prompted by memories of 1993, when a command post had been established in the complex's hotel (World Trade Center Three), he joined a few other Port Authority men and headed there through a passageway. They had assembled for a talk in the hotel bar along with some firemen when the place erupted in a tremendous roar. A pressure wave shattered glass, picked up the men, and threw them to the side. Lombardi thought that terrorists like those of 1993 had bombed the hotel and were maybe coming in through

the doors, and he considered the irony that he had survived then only to die now, not 200 feet from where terrorists had hit before. The truth was stranger still: the South Tower had just collapsed over his head, and he had been saved by a few unusually heavy beams used in the structural splinting and patching up that he himself had directed after the earlier bombing. But he knew none of this at the time.

To his surprise, he felt nothing broken and no pain except for a burning in his eyes. That was widely the pattern of the day—survival as an all-or-nothing proposition. The room was dark, and so dusty that he could not breathe. He put a handkerchief to his mouth. Someone yelled to a fireman, “Could you please put on your flashlight?” The fireman did, to little avail. People stood up, saying, “Where are we? What’s going on?” They lifted a steel roll-up door, thinking to get out, and found a group on the other side thinking to get in. The two groups frightened each other. A fireman went out to explore, and with visibility limited to about two feet, he nearly fell into a crater. He found a way across it and returned, saying, “Come on, I see a streetlight.” They went out in single file. Lombardi found himself on a sidewalk, but otherwise noticed no change from the conditions that had existed inside. He lost track of his companions and

could explain the collapses, and implied that the jet impacts were meant as bait for the rescue personnel. He was immediately inundated with e-mail from conspiracy theorists. After only a week he tried to take it all back, publicly renouncing his earlier ideas and signing on to the growing convention that fire and impact damage in combination were responsible for the collapses. Miserably, he said, “I’m very upset . . . I’m not trying to say anything did or didn’t happen.”

A Berkeley engineering professor named Abolhassan Astaneh-Asl was more successful. He pulled down an early grant from the National Science Foundation, rushed to New York, checked into the Tribeca Grand Hotel, got *The New York Times*’s ear, and began to show up on television inspecting twisted steel in the New Jersey scrapyards where it was being collected. Priscilla P. Nelson, of the National Science Foundation helpfully explained, “It is important for engineers to be able to make the observations now that will lead to reduced building vulnerabilities in the future.” A skeptic told me that some of the specimens Astaneh-Asl had identified on camera as bearing scars from the initial impacts were later discovered, from the numbering on them, to have originated much lower in the buildings. If true, however, it was hardly the sort of mistake that a man like

In retrospect, the greatest design failing of the towers was so obvious that it hardly required discussion: the stairwells had been clustered too closely together, and their simultaneous destruction had trapped people above the impact zones, causing as many as 1,500 unnecessary deaths.

walked down the street in confusion. He remembered the roar, and again thought of the bombing in 1993: had something gone off in the underground? He passed the south pedestrian bridge, which he recognized, and headed south on West Street. He had a scratch on his forehead that was bleeding. People came up to him offering help, and someone gave him some water. Finally he got far enough away to look back. He saw the North Tower standing, but not the South. He thought, “Wait a minute. The North Tower is there. I *know* the North Tower is there. But what happened to the South?” It was confounding, and he could not conceive of an answer. He was an engineer, but human, too. He walked on for a while, until for the second time that day he heard a roar. He stopped and turned and watched in disbelief as the North Tower fell.

It took distance to sort things out. The technical speculation began right away—on the Internet, in engineering offices, and in universities around the world—and some of it was wild. Among the early embarrassments were statements by Van Romero, an explosives expert and a vice-president of the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, who publicly opined that pre-set explosives

Astaneh-Asl could have been expected to renounce, or even to mope about. This was a big disaster, with all kinds of impacts, and he had important work to do. In December he announced that he would be collaborating with a programmer from the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory to build a “full-fledged, realistic model of the whole World Trade Center—including other buildings, not just the towers.” He said, “Then we’ll bring the plane in—to the computer model—and hit the building with various scenarios.” Priscilla P. Nelson helpfully explained that the work “could lead to the generation of new computer models that will really enhance our ability to understand structural response.” Astaneh-Asl may have revealed more than he meant to when he said, “The most important contribution of my career was to go to New York right after the attacks.”

There was a lot of that kind of talk at the time.

But the main investigation had a different tone—cautious, preliminary, and publicity-shy. It was funded with \$1 million from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and performed under the auspices of the venerable American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE). The granting of such public authority to a private professional organization to investigate events potentially related to the competence of its own

members would usually have raised legitimate questions about conflict of interest, but in this case it never quite did. Certainly there was an element here of a profession preparing to circle the wagons. The team was headed by an understated midwesterner named W. Gene Corley, who holds a Ph.D. in engineering and is the senior vice-president of a modest research facility north of Chicago. Corley had led the official engineering review of the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995, and had an impeccable reputation as an independent investigator of building failures. He was a steady man, and as close to a disinterested insider as America was likely to produce. But he had limited control over a team that had expanded from a preliminary selection of about a dozen specialists—experts in metallurgy, fire, structural dynamics, and so forth—to an unwieldy group of twenty-two that included some of the profession's biggest names. The expansion was not just due to an urge to contribute, or to an abstract interest in the subject matter. People were also concerned that the investigation not provide ammunition for future lawsuits. The team was set up so that each of the members would be able to influence the contents of the final report. The pattern was exemplified by LERA, where the Trade Center's original engineer, Leslie E. Robertson, excused himself for obvious reasons of proximity—only to cede his place to his wife, Saw-Teen See, the firm's managing partner. But these were exceptional times. There was widespread agreement that for the health of the United States as well as the companies involved, it was important to keep the hyenas at bay.

Everyone understood the deal. The attack on the World Trade Center was an act of war. Despite the occasional chatter in the press about shoddy steel or substandard fireproofing, the towers were as well designed, built, and maintained as could have reasonably been expected in America in the late twentieth century. But the context had changed now. The towers fell because they were severely maimed and sprayed with burning jet fuel; they fell as any building will, no matter how resilient, if it is hit by the next bigger missile in the escalating progression of war. In retrospect, their greatest failing was so obvious that it hardly required discussion: the stairwells had been clustered too closely together, and their simultaneous destruction had trapped people above the impact zones, causing more than a thousand unnecessary deaths. This was an error that would have to be avoided in future designs. But there was no point in wishful thinking here. Civilians die in wars, and always will.

Beyond that, however, it was important as much in principle as in practice to make an honest effort to understand the process and mechanisms of each tower's collapse. This was to be a preliminary investigation only, with an emphasis on going public with the essentials as soon as possible. Corley knew that the effort was never going to be what enthusiasts in Washington were wishing for—something like an airline-accident investigation, controlled and contained, with the

investigators on top, and the possibility even of a sexy reconstruction in a hangar as a finale. The Trade Center ruins were infinitely too large and chaotic to allow for that—and the emotions there, because of the continual discovery of bodies, were far too intense. The investigators spent some time at the site, but in practice their presence turned out to be of little help in the inquiry. Corley told me that given the weights and quantities involved, even the inspections of the steel that had been sorted at the New Jersey scrapyards proved to be an inefficient means of gathering evidence. This was certainly an argument against the critics who later claimed that all the steel should have been retained. More important were the videos and firsthand accounts from September 11, the original plans that LERA was providing, and the application of methodical science. Corley had confidence that the catastrophe could be reasoned through. It was obvious that critical inner workings of the collapses would remain obscure, and that debates and experiments concerning them would continue for years; indeed, this was an important part of the creative turbulence that followed the attacks, and that in time would lead to improvements in structural design. But as Corley had expected, by spring, as the last remains of the Trade Center were being removed, the essential facts were known.

The death of the South Tower was better understood than that of the North, because its symptoms showed particularly well. The 767 that approached from the south, United Flight 175, was a machine designed for lightness and efficiency, a slick aluminum tube 159 feet long with graceful wings stretching 156 feet from tip to tip, two fuel-efficient engines, and a cockpit that offered the pilots a gorgeous view. It was minimally loaded that morning for the Boston-to-Los Angeles run, with only sixty-five people aboard and about half of the maximum fuel, and as it approached the building it weighed about 137 tons. It was flying at about 586 mph, which was more than 150 mph above the airplane's designed limit at low altitude. In the cockpit the overspeed warning must have been warbling loudly.

The tower that soared above the cockpit in those last seconds was in its own way designed for lightness and efficiency—and it, too, was essentially a tube, though squared, 1,362 feet tall, and made of steel. Each of its faces was 209 feet wide and consisted of a palisade of aluminum-clad fourteen-inch box columns, which when bolted and welded together and braced by horizontal plates formed the exoskeleton that carried half the building's weight, and gave it all of its stiffness against side loads. The side loads were expected to come primarily from winds and, at the design limit of 150 mph, to amount to a maximum sustained 13-million-pound push. But the building was more resistant even than that, because the Port Authority, out of conservative impulse, had decided during the construction to go beyond the design and anchor the foundation struc-

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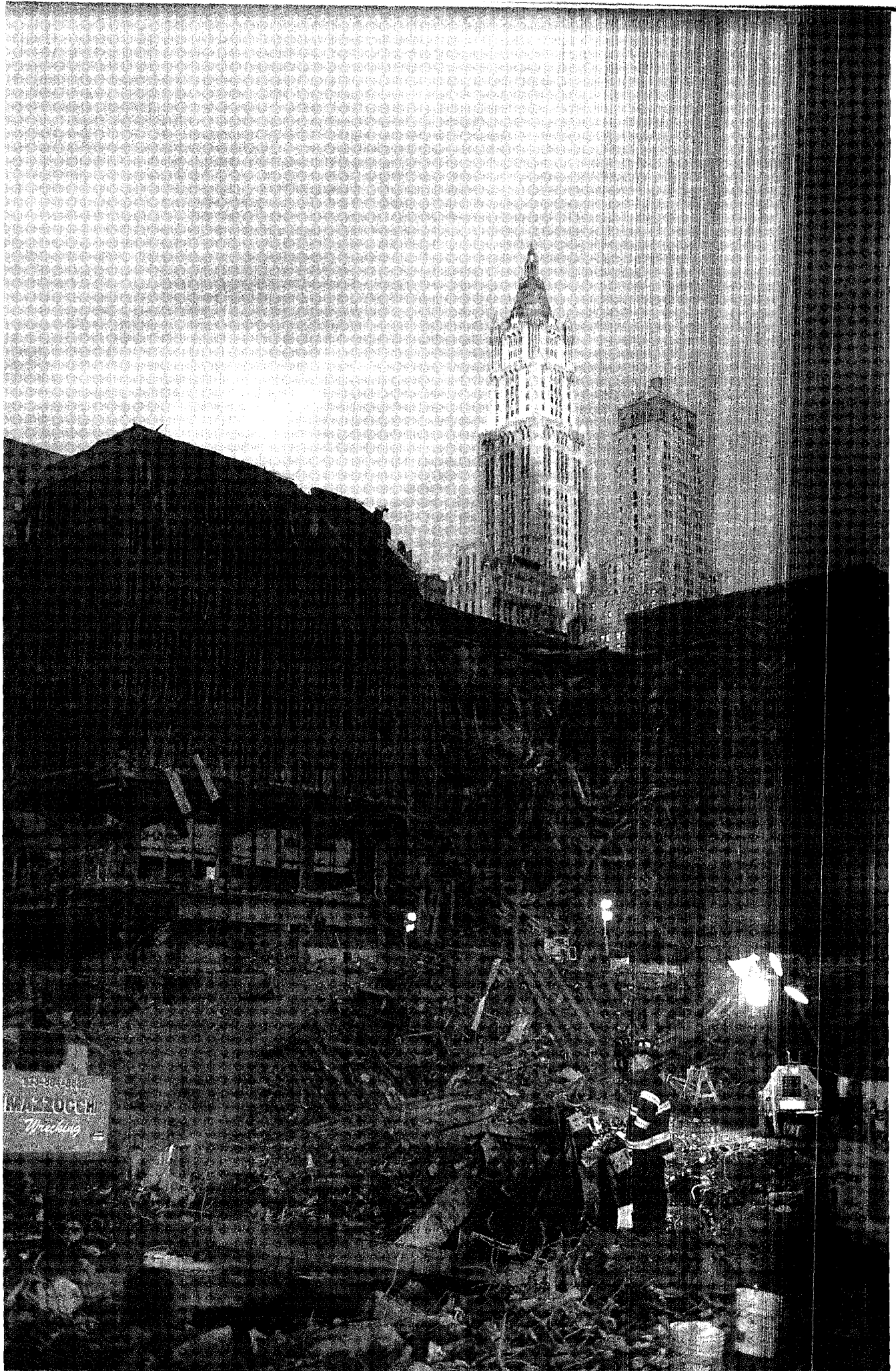
JIM WINESTOCK.



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ture directly into bedrock. Hidden inside the square tube of perimeter columns stood the other half of the support structure: a central core consisting of massive columns arranged in a rectangle much longer than wide, which was aligned in the South Tower on a north-south axis and contained the elevators and emergency stairwells. Though the core was not designed to resist side loads, its alignment meant that the north-south axis was, however marginally, the tower's strong one. More significant, it also meant that the acre of column-free office space on each floor (the goal of this tube-inside-a-tube design) was wider on the east and west sides (think viewless cubicles) and narrower on the north and south. The floors were built on thin steel trusses that bridged between the core and perimeter columns and supported corrugated-metal decks on which concrete was poured. The floors were thin and light, and served as diaphragms to stiffen the exterior columns against buckling forces. Because the vertical load lessened significantly with height, the thickness of the steel in the columns was progressively reduced from the bottom of the tower to the top. But no matter how it was trimmed, the weight added up. Ignoring all the people, furniture, and equipment that the tower contained, its structure alone weighed some 600,000 tons.

By comparison, the oncoming 767 was a mere pebble. But as pilots know, the energy of an impact goes up exponentially by the square of the increase in an airplane's speed—meaning if you go a little faster, you hit a whole lot harder. And this airplane was moving ferociously fast. The killer at the controls almost missed, and would merely have clipped the left wing, but he hooked his intent last turn like a wolf after prey, and punched hard into the south face of the tower three fourths of the way up, on the east side of center. The airplane hit about nine times harder than it would have during a typical accident while on an approach to landing. The building never came close to toppling sideways, but it swayed as much as twelve inches at the top, and endured a violent impulse that ran vertically through it like a rebounding wave. The airplane entered the building with its wings banked left, stretching from the seventy-eighth to the eighty-fourth floor, slicing through half the south-face perimeter columns. Frame by frame, the videos show it heading inside as if intact. An MIT study later estimated that only six percent of the plane's kinetic energy was expended against the south face. Almost all of the rest of the energy was expended inside—25 percent in tearing up the floors and pushing and piling the cubicles, and another 56 percent in damaging or severing as many as half the columns in the core. Two of the three stairwells were taken out, along with the people who were using them to evacuate the building in response to the earlier North Tower attack. The third stairwell was damaged but remained usable, and allowed several brave and desperate people trapped above to escape. A few of the airplane's heaviest parts—an engine,

a piece of landing gear, a wheel—kept right on going, as far as six blocks into the city, and a section of fuselage hit the roof of World Trade Center Five. But most of the airplane remained inside the intended victim, piled into a dike of mixed debris against the tower's north and east perimeter walls.

One of the many astonishments of that day is that the building was able to swallow a whole 767, and to slow it from 586 mph to a stop in merely 209 feet. According to calculations based on photographic evidence of the damaged perimeter, the structure had redistributed the gravity loads so efficiently that only twenty feet from the entry wound the demands being made on intact columns were hardly higher than normal. The building was certainly not safe. It had suffered serious if unknowable damage to the east side of the core. At the same time, for seventy feet along the inside of the south face, and perhaps a short distance along the east face, the floors had been torn loose from the structure, leaving perimeter columns unbraced under the gravity load of the roughly thirty-story building overhead. Still, if not exactly shrugging off the hit, the South Tower had absorbed it well: absent an earthquake or a strong windstorm, the building would have remained standing indefinitely.

But then, of course, there was the fire. As the airplane disintegrated, it released its fuel—roughly 10,000 gallons of volatile “Jet A” kerosene that sprayed and vaporized through the six floors of wreckage, poured into the elevator shafts, shot through broken windows along the north and east faces, and immediately ignited. Apocalyptic though it seemed, the huge fireball that blossomed over the plaza was actually to the building's advantage, because it consumed as much as a third of the available fuel, releasing the heat harmlessly into the air. That left two thirds of the fuel inside the tower, however, and it was widely spread and burning.

The building's sprinkler system had been destroyed by the impact, but in any case it would have lacked the pressure to operate effectively over such a wide area. More significant, much of the light spray-on fireproofing that coated the structural steel had been knocked away—and precisely in the same east-side areas that had sustained the worst damage and now were threatened by unusual and increased loads. On only one of these floors had a fireproofing upgrade that doubled the thickness of the coating been completed—a circumstance that provided for healthy debates afterward, though there was never direct evidence that the thicker fireproofing would have better endured the impact.

At any thickness, the coating was meant to insulate the steel and prevent it from overheating in a fire for at least two hours (by which time an office fire will typically have burned itself out in any given part of a building). The problem with overheating is that long before steel melts, it weakens. In structural steel like that of the South Tower the

weakening begins around 350°. By 1,100° the steel loses about half its strength. Kerosene burns twice that hot inside the carefully crafted furnace of an airliner's engine, but within the imperfect combustion chambers of the South Tower impact zone it is thought to have reached at most only about 1,500°—a temperature unlikely to induce the failure of such a tremendously redundant design, especially on a gentle, windless day. Moreover, the kerosene fire simply did not last long enough at any temperature to overheat the building's massive columns. Corley's fire specialists believed that the jet fuel never collected into deep, slow-burning pools, and that it burned through entirely within four minutes. They concluded that jet fuel itself did not bring the tower down.

What it did do, however, was set off raging office fires simultaneously on six different floors. It was a conflagration that would have been impossible for the firemen to control, had they gotten to it—a fire large enough to create its own powerful winds, sucking oxygen in through all the perimeter holes and broken windows, generating energy three to five times greater than that of a standard nuclear power plant, and eventually heating the steel to temperatures as high as 2,000°. The fire fed on wrecked office furniture, computers,

his earlier life. Frank Lombardi was pushing into the hotel bar somewhere far below. With its support giving way beneath it, the top of the tower tilted east and then south, rotating in a clockwise direction, and suddenly slammed down. Even if it had been felled from below, the tower could not have capsized in a conventional sense, because like most other buildings, it lacked the structure to hang together for more than a few degrees off vertical. But it was not felled from below; it was hammered from above, and it accelerated as it fell, crushing the core and peeling back the exoskeleton with each successive floor. As the external walls peeled, they broke primarily at the bolted connections, allowing welded pre-fabricated sections of the columns to fall free. The upper sections fell east and south, and hit the Bankers Trust building; the lower sections fell north and west, and gave the Marriott hotel the first of its two fatal blows.

The North Tower died a half hour after its twin, but because it showed fewer symptoms, less is known about its end. The attack it suffered was similar. It came from another 767, American Flight 11, which was light on passengers and fuel, and flying about 100 mph slower than the United flight, though still very fast. The initial impact involved a

One of the many astonishments of that day is that the South Tower was able to swallow a whole 767, and to slow it from 586 mph to a stop in merely 209 feet. But then, of course, there was the fire. It fed primarily on an ample supply of ordinary office paper.

carpets, and aircraft cargo, but primarily it fed on ordinary paper—an ample supply of the white sheets that were so much a part of the larger battlefield scene. Without that paper, the experts believed, the fire might not have achieved the intensity necessary to weaken the steel beyond its critical threshold. It would be simplifying things, but not by much, to conclude that it was paperwork that brought the South Tower down.

On the debris pile in the northeast corner the fire melted the remnants of the shattered airliner, which half an hour after entering the building began to flow in a stream of molten aluminum down the tower's outside. Still the tower endured. But then the southeast corner of the eightieth floor collapsed, triggering the progressive failure of the floor along the entire east side of the building. Dust plumes shot out through the broken windows. The eastern perimeter columns now stood unbraced for the space of at least two floors, adding to the dangers that the building already faced from the unbraced condition of the perimeter on the south side. Shortly afterward, in the southeast corner, near the entry wound, a cluster of exterior columns began to buckle. It was 9:59 exactly, merely fifty-six minutes after the airplane hit. Peter Rinaldi was living the last four seconds of

full, clean entry, almost perfectly centered. The airplane sliced through thirty-six of sixty-one columns on the north face, tore through four floors, and slammed squarely against the weak axis of the core. It took out all three stairwells, destroyed the sprinkler system, knocked the fireproofing from the steel, and blew a piece of landing gear and a fireball through the far wall. Lifejackets and parts of the seats ended up on the roof of the Bankers Trust building. The North Tower swayed, the jet fuel was rapidly consumed, and a terrible office fire broke out.

There were differences, too. The North Tower had the advantage of getting hit high up, thereby requiring less performance from the weight-bearing steel in the fire zone. This must certainly have saved lives. The external columns held. But by 10:28 their integrity was not enough. In this design of a tube within a tube, both tubes had to stand for either to survive. The North Tower core was aligned on an east-west axis, and it had been severely damaged—probably along its full length—by the airplane's centered impact. After nearly two hours of progressive weakening by fire, the remaining columns reached their limits. There was no sign of this on the outside. The South Tower of course had already fallen, and smoke was rising from a wound near the North

Tower's top. Nonetheless the building remained a monolith, seemingly as permanent and strong as stone. But then the 351-foot transmission tower on the roof sank a little. The movement was barely perceptible. Half a second later the floors above the impact zone dropped as a unit straight down through the office fire, creating a flare-up and the illusion of a secondary explosion before striking the first blow in the chain of blows that pancaked the monolith to the ground.

Is there any wonder that Frank Lombardi, the Port Authority's exalted chief engineer, had no understanding of what he had just seen? For the second time in an hour the Trade Center's dust darkened the sky. Lombardi walked to the Hudson's edge, where the dust cloud abruptly ended, and after a while he found his way onto a small ferryboat—one of several that had responded to the disaster and were nosing up to the shore, evacuating the shell-shocked survivors. The boat took on a full load of them, and headed across the river for New Jersey. Lombardi stood in the crowd near the stern, and gazed numbly at the receding city. From a hole where the Twin Towers should have been, a column of smoke and dust rose into the blue of the sky and, widening slowly, streamed out toward Brooklyn. This was the view already made famous around the world by television, evoking widespread fear and anger, and in some places celebration. Encountering it in reality on this river, with a warm wind on his face and the sound of the ferry's engines in his ears, Lombardi found it more than strange. By then he had heard a rumor about the cause—two airliners, it was said, involved in a coordinated attack—but people everywhere were full of frightened chatter, and he had no way to judge it. He may have sensed that he of all people should have been able to reason things through, but he could not. This must have been deeply disturbing to a man who was nothing if not pragmatic.

The ferry kept moving confidently toward New Jersey; that much at least was normal. But then, as it approached the far shore, its engines suddenly idled, and the captain leaned out and called, "Man overboard!" Lombardi checked the wake for the victim, to no avail. Now, instead, there was someone in the water ahead—and he appeared to be swimming toward the Trade Center. The captain slowly brought the boat up beside him, and the crew dropped a ladder. The swimmer was tiring. He reached up, and was about to be helped aboard, when someone shouted, "Don't let him in! Shoot him. He may be a terrorist!"

This halted the proceedings.

A policeman stepped forward uncertainly, and leaned over the rail. He said, "Excuse me, but what are you doing in the water?"

The swimmer said, "I thought I could swim over to New York to help people."

The policeman brought him up on deck. He said, "Let me get this straight. Let me understand this. We're bringing people over on a boat from there to here. Right?"

"Yeah."

"And *you* want to swim over there?"

"Right."

The policeman did what policemen do, maybe for lack of imagination. He said, "You're under arrest." He probably figured the man was unbalanced, and dangerous at least to himself. He was still holding him when Lombardi got off the boat.

Lombardi found his way to the Port Authority offices in Jersey City, above a commuter station known as Journal Square. It was there in the early afternoon, when he saw the events replayed on television, that he first was able to understand what had happened to the buildings, and to begin the slow process of acceptance. Two months later, when I met him in midtown Manhattan, he had come a long way but was still not all the way there. He had a manner of talking about the towers as if they had once been alive. He had obviously been thinking heavily about their deaths.

He knew many details of the attacks, and he told me he thought that the terrorist who came in first, against the North Tower (in which Lombardi himself was sitting), had intended to knock it right over—a motive that explained the perfect centering and the high hit against the weak axis of the core. Furthermore, he proposed that the second terrorist, while crossing the Hudson and setting up his own attack, had observed the wounded building still standing, and at the last moment had decided on a strategy of avoiding a direct hit against what he knew was the strong axis of the South Tower's core, instead choosing to hit the building low and on one side, in an attempt to undercut it and trigger a collapse. If so, he was fantastically nimble. I had another view of the attack—that the terrorists were operating not as engineers but as executioners, that they were imbued with clumsy metaphors of swift swords and decapitation blows, and that the second one had simply missed his stroke by a few feet, as is easy to do with a fast-moving airplane. Lombardi, I thought, was sometimes still thinking like a defeated man, investing too much competence in his enemies.

He was a gentle person. You could see him actively trying to recover his equilibrium—swinging between the old-fashioned Port Authority can-do confidence, which was coming back, and a persistent fatigue, a vagueness that was said by his friends to be something new. In many ways he was the ultimate Port Authority man, and he seemed to embody the organization especially in its ambivalent response to the Trade Center disaster. He rarely came to the site. It was as if the loss there was still too painful to contemplate. But he also told me that he was proud and glad for Peter Rinaldi, his chosen representative, who had seized this chance to take action.

Peter Rinaldi was the lucky one. He worked seven days a week, often fifteen hours a day. His base was the city's emergency operations center, in the kindergarten rooms of Public School 89. The school occupied the second floor of a new red-brick building just inside the emergency perimeter, two blocks north of the Trade Center site on West Street. It had been safely evacuated on September 11 before the towers fell. When the city's recovery team set up headquarters there a few days later, there was time only to dump the food from the children's lunch boxes so that it would not rot. The lunch boxes themselves stayed in the classrooms, piled in rows on the shelves, with the names still displayed: Patrick, Elizabeth, various Jennifers, and all the other children who had fled with their parents to safe havens and new schools elsewhere in the city or beyond. For two months afterward the classrooms remained as they were, with strip posters of the alphabet taped to the chalkboards, and colorful, childish art pinned to the walls.

The inner sanctum was a corner room with cinder-block walls painted creamy white, and linoleum floors now brown with the dirt tracked in from the site. The shelves that lined the walls were still filled with blocks, toys, and plastic crates of Dr. Seuss and other children's books. At the center stood four folding tables that had been pushed together, along with some folding chairs that had been scavenged from somewhere. When the tables grew crowded, people simply used the kindergarten stuff—pint-sized furniture built low to the ground, which was discovered to be strong enough even for 250-pound construction workers. Visitors often remarked on the strangeness of the scene, in which full-grown men and women, including powerful executives and renowned engineers, sat around as if they were playing at being children again. In fact the stakes were large, and so were many of the egos involved. But the room did not allow for displays. People there dressed alike in dirty boots and rough clothes, and no matter who they were, they had to prove themselves again. Their conversations were held in the open for lack of choice. There was no time for memos, or for chain consultations. The e-mail connection was permanently down. The phones did not work. When problems arose, they were dealt with right away, either in the room or, if more information was needed, with a walk down the street to the pile, and a decision on the spot. This is what Peter Rinaldi encountered when he first arrived. As the operational center of a billion-dollar effort, Public School 89 was a highly unusual place.

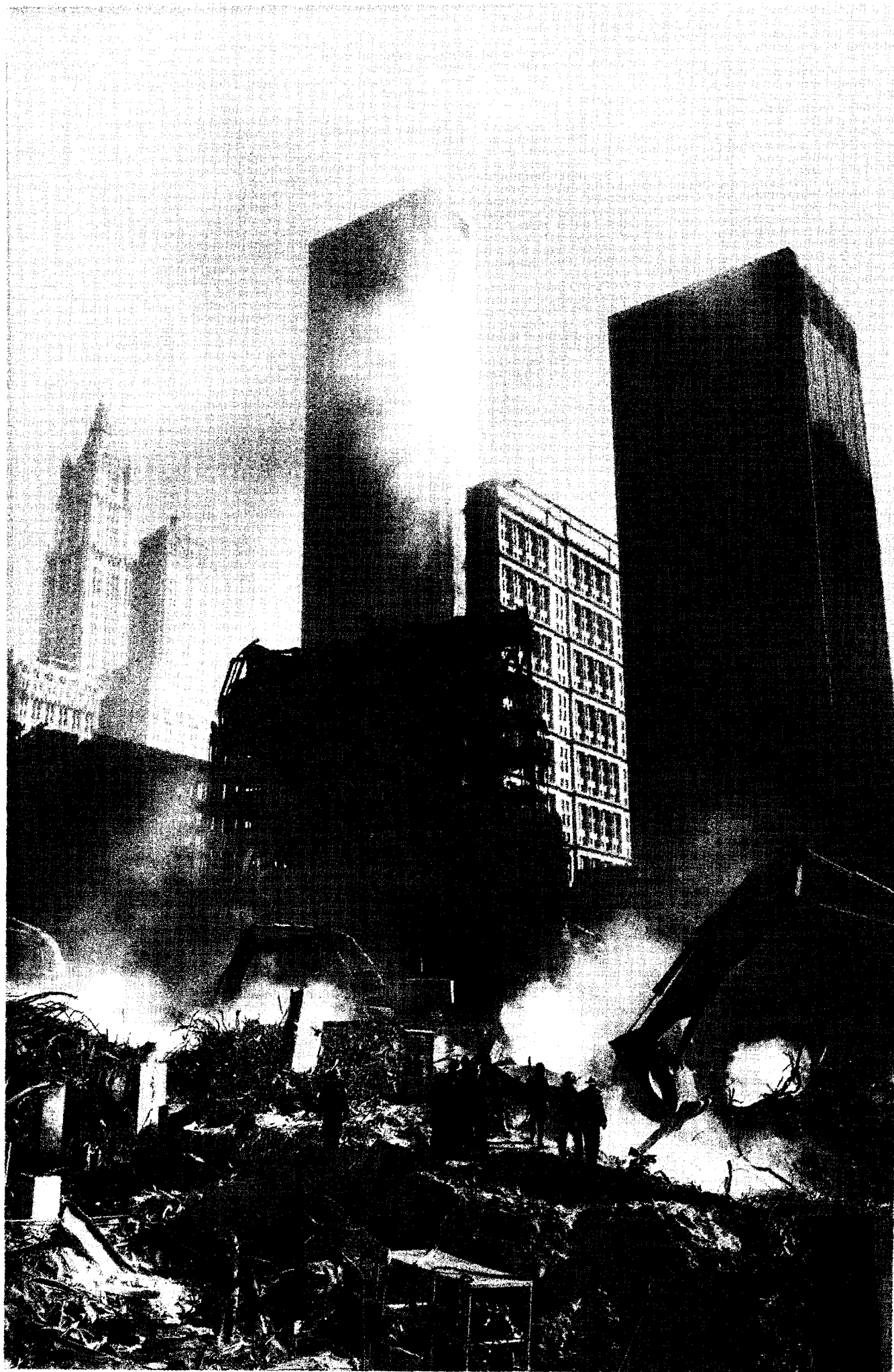
Leading the effort was the unlikely duo of Kenneth Holden and his lieutenant, Michael Burton—the two Department of Design and Construction officials who had emerged from bureaucratic obscurity on September 11 to orchestrate an effective response to the disaster. Holden, the DDC's shrewd and intellectually sophisticated commissioner, was a heavyset man who had grown up in an

atmosphere of suburban ease, had worked on a kibbutz in Israel, and had studied history at Columbia. Having drifted by chance into a city-government job, he was now, at forty-four, one of the youngest department heads in New York City government. Burton was a slightly younger man, a thirty-nine-year-old marathon runner and construction-industry insider who, having been raised in modest circumstances, had earned a degree in engineering and an M.B.A. from colleges in the Bronx, and was aggressively climbing the ladder of social and material success.

The two men made an awkward pair. Each had rushed independently to City Hall at the first news of the attack, and had been caught on the streets and forced to run when the towers collapsed. By that afternoon they had met up and, with no thought beyond a few hours into the future, had begun to enlist the help of others within the DDC, and to organize the arrival of expert engineers and heavy equipment at the Trade Center site. They did not ask permission to do this—nor, at first, did anyone pay much attention to their work. The DDC was not even mentioned in the city's official emergency-response plan. The focus over the first few days was mostly on the drama of the bucket brigades. But as is widely known, Mayor Giuliani had smart reactions to the crisis. Later it seemed that one of the smartest was a back-room decision to scrap the organization charts, to finesse the city's own Office of Emergency Management, and to allow the DDC to proceed. The federal government was poised to intervene, but agreed to hold off, and then to hold off again. The result was the classroom at Public School 89, that strange kindergarten scene through which control of the contractors was exercised and federal funds flowed.

Holden spent months on his cell phone there, marshaling resources for the operation, defending it from political attack, and creating the shelter in which Mike Burton then could operate. Burton's job was to oversee the practical details of the cleanup. He was tireless: he excused himself from his home life in suburban Westchester County, moved to an empty apartment in Battery Park City, and began spending eighteen hours a day at the site, roaming the pile even late at night, searching for efficiencies, forever urging the crews to work faster. He was not a popular man. He was extremely ambitious. He was determined to finish the project in less than a year. The firemen in particular disdained him for what they saw as his disrespect for their dead. There were days when it became awkward for him to go out onto the pile, because of his sour relations with the men there. Not without irony, people called him the Trade Center Czar. But such a boss was probably needed to get the job done. The scale and complexity of the ruins required it. And on a level just below him there were too many other bosses who did little more than eat and mill around.

Indeed, for the first two months the site's outer zone was so dense with agencies and their equipment that the



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debris trucks at times could not get through, and the hauling operation had to shut down. It sometimes seemed that every official with a uniform or a badge within a hundred miles wanted to put in time there. Even the dog-catchers from Long Island showed up. They hauled in a mobile spay-and-neuter clinic to use as a command post, and sat around on lawn chairs for weeks, wearing T-shirts imprinted in block letters with SPCA—LAW ENFORCEMENT. They carried pistols, too—part of the impressive brandishing of weapons all around the ruins. One afternoon, as we walked toward the pile, Pablo Lopez, the indomitable Ecuadorian engineer, said to me, “When you see even guys from the EPA carrying guns, you’ve got to wonder. What’s an environmentalist doing carrying around a Glock? Who’s he gonna shoot?” The weaponry made people seem impotent and out of touch, as if they had showed up too late for the fight.

The frustration was that you couldn’t dislodge the debris by shooting it. Because of the bodies that lay there, you couldn’t dynamite it either. Because of New York’s sensitivities to noise and dust, you couldn’t even use small demolition charges to fill dangerous cavities or bring down the skeletal walls. There was no choice but to cut and pull and

almost tidy work of it; AMEC in the northwest corner of the foundation hole, often bumbling, arousing the ire of the DDC, and falling behind; Bovis in the southwest corner, progressing steadily in the difficult area of the Marriott ruins and the south skeletal wall, while playing off its management skills to spread incrementally throughout the site, most significantly by taking on the all-important project to save the foundation hole’s walls; and, finally, Tully, everyone’s favorite, the hardworking red-meat guys, who kept pulling recklessly ahead and devouring the ruins along the entire east side.

These were the forces, roughly 3,000 strong, that Ken Holden and Mike Burton unleashed. In a painful and probably necessary process they slowly wrested control from the firemen. In late October the operation became a “joint command” between all the uniformed services and the DDC. Realistically, because the uniformed services were split by long-standing rivalries and had little of technical value to contribute, the joint command left the civilians in charge—a fact that became increasingly obvious at the regularly scheduled “unified” meetings, where the Fire Department retained a functional veto power, but only the DDC seemed capable of moving ahead.

People would never have wished this calamity on themselves or others, but inside the perimeter lines and beyond the public’s view it served for many as an unexpected liberation—a national tragedy that was unambiguous and surprisingly energizing. Was this not war, after all?

unbuild the chaos one piece at a time. Burton understood this early. While others stood around with their guns, he and Holden imposed a rough order on the site by dividing it into quadrants, roughly equal zones that he assigned to four large construction companies: Turner, Bovis, AMEC, and Tully. The first three were essentially management teams—multinational corporations in the high-rise construction business, which had little equipment of their own and relied on other contractors to get the work done. The fourth company, Tully, was quite a different thing—a family-owned New York paving contractor with little structural experience but plenty of trucks, heavy equipment, and experienced workers of its own. All four companies had teamed up with the DDC before and were major players in New York.

The quadrants were never as neatly delineated on the ground as on the site maps, but during the critical opening stages of the project they served to concentrate each company on the debris immediately at hand, and to keep people from being overwhelmed by the magnitude of the process that lay ahead. The effect across time was a shaping of the pile according to the respective corporate personalities: Turner in isolation on the ruins of World Trade Center Seven, efficiently disassembling the debris and making

Emotions were raw. One of the unacknowledged aspects of the tragedy was the jealous sense of ownership that it brought about—an unexpected but widespread feeling of something like pride, that “this is our disaster more than yours.” The feeling started at large in the United States, and became more acute with proximity to the site—a progression of escalating possessiveness that ran from the halls of Washington through suburban New Jersey to New York, and from there through Lower Manhattan to the pile itself, where it divided the three main groups (fire, police, and construction) and sometimes set them against one another. The firemen in particular felt that they had a special relationship with the site, not only because they had lost 343 people there—out of a force of 14,000—but also because afterward their survivors, along with their dead, had been idolized as national heroes, and subjected to the full force of modern publicity. A few of them reacted embarrassingly, by grandstanding on television and at public events, striking tragic poses and playing themselves up. Even at the site, where people generally disliked such behavior, you would sometimes find firemen signing autographs at the perimeter gates or, after the public viewing stand was built, drifting over to work the crowds. Most of them behaved more

soberly, no matter what pride they may secretly have felt, if for no other reason than that their firehouse culture frowned on self-aggrandizement. Still, there was resentment by the police, who had lost plenty of their own people, and by the construction crews, who took it upon themselves to remember the far greater number of civilian dead. These tensions flared especially over the differing treatment of human remains—on the one extreme, the elaborate flag-draped ceremonials that the firemen accorded their own dead, and on the other, the jaded “bag ‘em and tag ‘em” approach that they took to civilians. A strange blindness caused them to persist with this behavior despite the ease with which it could have been remedied. Even Sam Melisi participated in it, for instance once bemoaning a “drought” to me when the remains being uncovered were merely those of civilians. It was a surprisingly ganglike view, and it encouraged a gang mentality among others on the pile.

Still, most people at the site understood that the loss the firemen felt was real. One morning in October, I accompanied Ken Holden into the expanding valley at the center of the pile, where a temporary access road of ground-asphalt millings was being built. A fire chief came up and said, “You gotta give us time. You gotta get these guys to stop covering up the debris, burying us with dirt.”

Before Holden could answer, another fireman, an older man in filthy clothes and a scarred helmet, rushed up and said, “You stop these guys from pushing dirt in here!” He had a weathered face, and heavy sweat on his upper lip. His eyes were wild. He said, “I’ve got two friends out there. And I’ve got my son buried right in here.” Holden put a calming hand on his shoulder, but to no effect. The fireman wandered off with his shovel, a short entrenching tool bent 90 degrees, and climbed down into a hole in the rubble. The chief repeated almost apologetically, “He lost his son in there.”

Holden said, “How much time do you need? A day? Two days?”

The chief swept his hand wide. “They’re buried all through.” Holden went off to find Burton and tell him to stop the road for now. When he came back, the old fireman was down on his knees, probing loose debris and sniffing shovelfuls for the scent of death.

For most of the men on the pile, the loss was less acute. Even if these were fellow firemen who had died, and even if they were close friends and even if people used the word “brother” to describe them, it was not the same as losing a son. Still, over the first few months there was a lot of sadness at the site. Away from the photographers and TV cameras, the depth of it was not always obvious. The Fire Department search parties operated on a regularized schedule in small groups beside the diesel excavators, and they sifted through the fresh debris with workmanlike efficiency. But they also took risks for no obvious reasons—jumping suddenly into newly opened debris holes, climbing on the unstable cliffs, and, especially, standing for hours in

the heaviest smoke and dust, refusing as a matter of pride to wear the respirators that dangled around their necks. They seemed to have surrendered to an attitude of reckless self-abandonment. To varying degrees the police and construction workers had surrendered to it too. In one of the Salvation Army feeding tents I talked to a psychologist who blamed the risk-taking on “survivor guilt,” which he called a common reaction to disaster. To me, however, it looked like a simpler form of grief.

But the risk-taking was also the expression of a more creative and courageous impulse, linked to the need for action and improvisation, and part of the personal freedom that was unexpectedly emerging at the Trade Center site. It was a response as well to the sheer magnitude of this calamity, the hijackings, the killings, the collapses—events so extreme that they required extreme actions in return. Despite all the divisions at the site, this was the fundamental understanding that people shared—and, indeed, that the culture at the site demanded.

And then, of course, there was the pile, always the pile. It had been the focus of ferocious energy during the collapse, and now again was the focus during the unbuilding. The pile was an extreme in itself. It was not just the ruins of seven big buildings but a terrain of tangled steel on an unimaginable scale, with mountainous slopes breathing smoke and flame, roamed by diesel dinosaurs and filled with the human dead. The pile heaved and groaned and constantly changed, and was capable at any moment of killing again. People did not merely work to clear it out but went there day and night to fling themselves against it. The pile was the enemy, the objective, the obsession, the hard-won ground. ■

William Langewiesche is a national correspondent for The Atlantic. This three-part Atlantic series will be published later this year as a book, American Ground: Unbuilding the World Trade Center, by North Point Press, a division of Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

COMING IN SEPTEMBER

PART II:

“The Rush to Recover”

IN OCTOBER

PART III:

“The Dance of the Dinosaurs”



THE FBI AND MARTIN LUTHER KING

Martin Luther King was never himself a Communist—far from it. But the FBI's wiretapping of King was precipitated by his association with Stanley Levison, a man with reported ties to the Communist Party. Newly available documents reveal what the FBI actually knew—the vast extent of Levison's Party activities

BY DAVID J. GARROW

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On October 10, 1963, U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy committed what is widely viewed as one of the most ignominious acts in modern American history: he authorized the Federal Bureau of Investigation to begin wiretapping the telephones of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. Kennedy believed that one of King's closest advisers was a top-level member of the American Communist Party, and that King had repeatedly misled Administration officials about his ongoing close ties with the man. Kennedy acted reluctantly, and his order remained secret until May of 1968, just a few weeks after King's assassination and a few days before Kennedy's own. But the FBI onslaught against King that followed Kennedy's authorization remains notorious, and the stains on the reputations of everyone involved are indelible.

Yet at the time, neither Robert Kennedy nor anyone else outside the FBI knew more than a tiny part of the story that had led to that decision, or even the identities of the two FBI informants who had set the investigation in motion. Only in 1981 were their names—Jack and Morris Childs—

publicly revealed, but even then the relevant documents were so heavily redacted that only the most bare-bones sketch of what had taken place was possible.

But now an ongoing FBI "reprocessing" of those documents, pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act, is resulting in the release of hundreds of largely unredacted pages that finally allow the story to be told.

The crucial figure was Stanley David Levison, a white New York lawyer and businessman who first met Martin Luther King in 1956, just as the young minister was being catapulted to national fame as a result of his role in the remarkable bus boycott against racially segregated seating in Montgomery, Alabama. The FBI knew, in copious firsthand detail from the Childs brothers, that Levison had secretly served as one of the top two financiers for the Communist Party USA in the years just before he met King. The Childs brothers' direct, personal contact with Levison from the

Above: surveillance photo of Stanley D. Levison, Martin Luther King, and Clarence B. Jones, New York, November 20, 1963

mid-1940s to 1956 was sufficient to leave no doubt whatsoever that their reports about his role were accurate and truthful. Their proximity to Levison also gave them direct knowledge of his disappearance from CPUSA financial affairs in the years *after* 1956.

In the months immediately following Levison's visible departure from CPUSA activities, his selfless assistance to King soon established him as the young minister's most influential white counselor. But when the FBI tardily learned of Levison's closeness to King in early 1962, the Bureau understandably hypothesized that someone with Levison's secret (though thoroughly documented) record of invaluable service to the CPUSA might very well not have turned up at Martin Luther King's elbow by happenstance. With the FBI suggesting that Levison's seeming departure from the CPUSA was in all likelihood a ruse, Robert Kennedy and his aides felt they had little choice but to assume the worst and act as defensively as possible. The Kennedy Administration kept itself at arm's length from King, and events quickly spiraled, with the federal government undertaking extensive electronic surveillance of King himself.

The information that Jack and Morris Childs furnished the FBI, from 1952 to 1956, about their repeated face-to-face dealings with Stanley Levison concerning CPUSA finances establishes beyond any possible question that Levison in those years was a highly important Party operative. Given how richly detailed the Childs brothers' evidence about Levison actually was, the new and unredacted information merits an airing at some length.

The story began in late 1951 or early 1952, in New York, when two Bureau agents approached Jack Childs, a forty-four-year-old CPUSA veteran who until late 1948 had been a low-level functionary in the Party's highly secret financial apparatus. Jack's older brother Morris, a senior Party figure who previously had been the head of the CPUSA in Illinois, had been removed as editor of the Party newspaper, the *Daily Worker*, in mid-1947, ostensibly because of a serious heart condition. Then, in 1948, the CPUSA failed to provide medical support when one of Jack's young sons was stricken with a cancer that cost him an eye, and the brothers all but quit the Party.

One CPUSA veteran who observed their alienation was Patrick Toohey, who in the late 1930s had been the CPUSA's resident ambassador in Moscow. When Toohey began co-operating with the FBI, in the spring of 1950, Jack and Morris Childs were among the former colleagues whose experiences he recounted. The Bureau soon succeeded in adding Jack Childs to its stable of informants, and after an introduction from Jack, both Morris and Morris's companion, Sonia Schlossberg, followed suit.

Jack Childs had served as primary "leg man," or assistant, to William Weiner, the CPUSA's chief financier, from 1945 to 1948. In May of 1952 he recalled for agents how

Weiner had garnered secret contributions and handled the Party's extensive cash repositories. Among the top contributors, Jack said, were Stanley and Roy Levison, twin brothers who owned a Ford dealership in northern New Jersey that contributed well over \$10,000 a year to the CPUSA. "On three or four occasions after Weiner had received money from Stanley Levison, Weiner gave the money to Jack Childs who placed it in a safe deposit box in Childs' name" at a New York bank, an FBI memo detailing one of Jack's earliest debriefings recounted. What's more, when Jack stopped working for Weiner, in 1948, "he transferred to Stanley Levison all cash, bonds, and lists of depositories and records there[to]fore under the informant's control." Stanley Levison was a new name to the FBI.

The FBI's interest in the Childs brothers concerned the future far more than the past, and the Bureau wondered whether their long-standing friendship with Weiner could lead to their reactivation as Communist Party members. Morris, living in Chicago, expected a visit from Weiner in September of 1952, but late that month he informed his handler, Special Agent Carl Freyman, that another visitor from New York had been in touch with him a few days earlier: Stanley Levison. Levison "told the informant that he had been delegated by William Weiner of the National Office, Communist Party, to contact informant," and Levison "questioned him concerning reasons for his failure to keep in contact with the National Office of the Communist Party, and also concerning the informant's health." Morris's answers more than passed muster; Levison briefed him on a host of Party developments and stressed the importance of precautions to avoid FBI tails and surveillance. "Levison advised the informant that he spent one and one-half hours reaching the point where he contacted the informant." The painful irony of Stanley Levison's vetting Morris Childs for reactivation in the upper reaches of the CPUSA would start to become clear only a decade later.

Morris traveled to New York City for a ten-day visit late in November, and phoned Weiner upon his arrival. Weiner "greeted him warmly and suggested that CG 5824-S [Morris's FBI-informant code number] call Stanley Levison. NY 694-S [Jack's informant code number] advised that Weiner with Levison's assistance controls the financial operations of the CPUSA. As a result of a call to Levison [Morris] met Levison in front of NY Public Library," on Forty-second Street. A day or two later Morris met Weiner at Penn Station and went with him to Weiner's home, in Far Rockaway, Queens, where Morris spent the night. "Weiner was curious to know how [Morris] existed during the past four years and [Morris] gave him a plausible explanation which seemed to satisfy Weiner. [Morris] mentioned that [Jack] had been of considerable assistance to him financially." Weiner arranged for Morris to meet the CPUSA leader, William Z. Foster, for lunch a few days later, and Morris's rehabilitation appeared all but complete.

In late January of 1953 Harry I. Miller, of Chicago, a longtime Party activist whose business, the LaSalle Leather Company, was another big contributor to the CPUSA's secret accounts, visited New York. Jack Childs, who had helped to set LaSalle up as a Party business before handing off the connection to Levison in 1948, met Miller in the lobby of the Park Sheraton Hotel, at Seventh Avenue and Fifty-sixth Street, at 4:30 P.M. on January 24, as FBI agents watched. "Fisur ['physical surveillance'] revealed that at 5:35PM, 1/24/53, Miller was engaged in conversation with [Jack] in the lobby of the hotel." As Jack later related, Miller told him that "Levison gets about \$200 per week out of the business for the CP," somewhat less than LaSalle's contribution back in 1948, and that he and Levison had also acquired a 50 percent interest in another firm, Liberty Luggage, on behalf of the Party.

Minutes after Jack and Miller parted in the lobby, Stanley Levison visited Miller's hotel room, where the FBI had planted a recording device. Among other subjects, according to an FBI paraphrasing of their conversation, Levison and Miller "discussed anti-Semitism in Russia and the satellite countries."

They stated that a couple of the Russian leaders had been accused of anti-Semitism, but that this was only a rumor. Stanley stated that he was a lawyer and that the evidence in the matter would not be admissible in any court. Stanley said that the trouble involved Jewish capitalists. Stanley said that Israel had moved over to the West and now was a real danger spot; that Zionism had become a major menace, and that Israel is now an enemy state—a Fascist state just like Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia had been. Stanley said that a year ago Israel pretended to have a foot in each camp.

A few moments later "Stanley said that the anti-Semitism situation was not as bad as the 'pact' (possibly the Hitler-Stalin Pact) which could not be discussed with people."

Morris Childs returned to New York in early May and again saw Levison; a few months later Levison told Jack that the Bureau had tried unsuccessfully to plant someone in Miller's Chicago office. But "bag jobs"—the Bureau's name for illegal late-night break-ins in which the victims' office files were photographed—gave agents many of the details they needed about Levison's and Miller's CP business operations. Cooperative bank officers, who made available all the records of their customers' financial transactions, supplied the rest. Levison was helping another Chicago Party veteran, Victor Ludwig, launch a lithographic printing venture called Sunset Plate, in Los Angeles, and Jack Childs eagerly pitched in. "When [Jack] reported the results of his operations in behalf of Levison to the latter, Levison was highly pleased and offered to compensate [Jack] in the amount of \$200 for his services. [Jack] declined to accept the money for himself, suggesting that Levison give the money to the CP as a donation from [Jack]." Jack and Morris seemed like devoted Communists indeed.

Levison and Betty Gannett, a top CPUSA administrator, each told Jack and Morris that the Party was greatly wor-

ried about the liver cancer that was threatening to end William Weiner's life, and in mid-November of 1953 Jack reported that Weiner's aide, Lem Harris, expected that "the heaviest burden of Weiner's business enterprises probably will fall upon Stanley Levison" following Weiner's death. Jack was seeing Levison regularly, but with Weiner's end approaching, he also pressed Gannett to draw Morris into more top-level work, telling her that in his opinion "[Morris] is a better Communist today than he ever was, and his best work is ahead of him."

By early 1954 the Party was in desperate need of funds. The Childs brothers had long-standing ties to Canadian Communists, some of whom had known Morris since their joint training in Moscow, in the early 1930s. The Canadians might possibly open a crucial financial spigot. Then, on February 20, William Weiner died, and the following day Morris flew to New York and went with Jack immediately to the funeral home. Weiner's widow, Esther, was hysterically furious at the CPUSA's lack of interest during her husband's final days; as a result, an FBI memo summarizing Morris's experience recounts, "the informant and [Jack] then purchased a wreath and this was the first bouquet of flowers that appeared on the Weiner casket."

Esther Weiner told Morris that she felt she did have some friends, namely "the brothers (Stanley and Roy Levison) and you," but she also said that on the very day of her husband's death Stanley and his wife, Beatrice, had come to the Weiner home to remove many of "Willie's" financial documents. She asked Morris to see Levison in her behalf, to ask that Party financial support still come her way. "The informant met Levison at the Statler Hotel in New York and had lunch with Levison ... Levison during this conversation indicated that he had taken over most of the CP national financial responsibilities ... and indicated that he had assumed most of the responsibility for the 'big money financing' formerly held by Weiner."

Four weeks after Weiner's death Betty Gannett asked Jack to open the Canadian pipeline as soon as possible, because the CPUSA had a "desperate" need for \$120,000. She asked that the Canadian Party "transmit through [Jack] 'as much cash as the Canadian CP can spare without affecting adversely its own immediate needs.'" Gannett told Jack "that responsibility for raising the \$120,000 ... rests upon her and Stanley Levison, each being responsible for \$60,000."

Following Weiner's death the FBI stepped up its surveillance of Levison, wiretapping his home telephone for the first time and arranging—with the "excellent" cooperation of a former Bureau agent employed by Chicago's Conrad Hilton Hotel—for the bugging of his room during a late April trip there. That cooperation further allowed for the photographing of Levison's papers and also those of his fellow guest Victor Ludwig. During one electronically preserved conversation Levison explained "the Party's success in

infiltrating” the American Jewish Congress, in which Levison had become an officer for the West Side of Manhattan chapter. As a result, Levison said, the chapter was publicly criticizing the McCarran-Walter immigration law and the Red-baiting Senator Joseph McCarthy, of Wisconsin, in full accord with the CPUSA’s political agenda. Levison said that he himself had given six anti-McCarran talks, and “he advised that he indirectly incorporated in these speeches the idea that the Eisenhower administration was rapidly advancing toward fascism.”

When Harry Miller visited New York, in July, the FBI again rolled out its hotel-room tape recorders. A summary reported that at 11:15 P.M. on July 26, as Miller and Levison conversed, “Miller received a telephone call from [Morris], who was in the lobby of the Statler Hotel and Levison and Miller immediately left the room to join him ‘for coffee.’” A few days later Morris advised the Bureau that the Party’s National Finance Committee was now composed of Levison; Cannett; Isadore Wofsy, of New York; and Jack Kling, of Chicago.

In late November of 1954 Levison told Jack Childs that the Party would no longer invest in new businesses, for fear of their vulnerability to hostile government action. Instead the CPUSA would focus more than ever on recruiting or re-activating major donors, or “angels,” who could make annual contributions of five or six figures.

At the end of 1954 a longtime Party operative named Phil Bart supplanted Kling and took overall charge of CPUSA financial matters. Morris passed along Esther Weiner’s description of how Levison had taken her on a “very circuitous route” to meet Bart, and early in 1955 Jack recounted a similar story told to him by Lem Harris: “According to Harris he had been taken by Stanley and Roy Levison by a circuitous route to a secret rendezvous in NYC where he met Bart.”

But just a few days later Jack reported a more intriguing piece of news related to him by a Party operative named Sam Brown, who had attempted to get in touch with the Levison brothers about prospective donors, only to be told “that hereafter, and for an indefinite period, the Levisons are ‘out of circulation’ and may not be contacted by their ‘old friends.’” Jack wondered if this meant that they were engaged in “underground operations,” but he obtained no definitive explanation. Meanwhile, the Party’s financial crisis deepened. Bart told Jack two months later that the “Reserve Fund,” the hoard of cash and bonds that Weiner had long overseen, had received no new income in the past year. Given that, “Bart said he should like to invest a part of the Reserve Fund in a ‘sure-fire investment,’ such as a business that would return a hundred percent profit without risk.” Neither the Communist financiers nor the FBI agents busy monitoring their day-by-day conversations appear to have appreciated the irony of the CPUSA’s hoping to build communism through free-market capitalism.

No improvement in contributions occurred during subsequent months, and Bart complained to Morris that “even

the Levison boys have grown stale and are in a rut.” But the FBI, on notice from its wiretaps that Levison was rendezvousing in public places on an almost weekly basis with Isadore Wofsy, finally managed to witness one such encounter, at midday on June 24, 1955, in a subway corridor at Forty-second Street, just three blocks from Levison’s office, on East Thirty-ninth Street. Forty minutes later the agents saw the two men inside the Woolworth’s store across the street from Levison’s office, “where [Levison] handed a white envelope to Wofsy.” Four weeks later agents saw Levison and Wofsy meeting in the same subway corridor. “Levison and Wofsy engaged in a discussion at this location for about fifteen minutes and were observed to be making frequent references to papers which both held in their hands.”

The FBI believed that Stanley Levison remained a major player in the CPUSA financial hierarchy, but neither a renewed wiretap on his home telephone nor a series of late-night bag jobs at his office produced any evidence to flesh out his encounters with Isadore Wofsy. The burglars were “unable to develop any information appearing to be connected with CP underground activity, or any new data appearing to be connected with current CP financial operations,” a New York report to FBI headquarters about one mid-August break-in concluded.

But Jack’s and Morris’s information continued to attest to Levison’s active involvement. In mid-September, Sam Brown told Jack that the Levison brothers were coming to his apartment one evening to discuss Party finances; in early December, Morris, in New York for a national Party conference, recounted how a Chicago Party member had informed him that “he obtained \$500 for the Illinois-Indiana District from Stan Levison, and asked [Morris] to contact Levison before leaving New York City to obtain additional money for the Illinois-Indiana District from Levison.” On December 8, FBI headquarters was told, Morris displayed to an agent “an envelope containing \$700 which he had obtained on that date from Levison.”

Similar reports persisted into 1956. On April 2 Jack told Bureau agents that Isadore Wofsy had come to his office at noon to ask him to “hold” \$1,000 in cash, because Wofsy, who now bore the title of CPUSA treasurer, feared that he might be “picked up” by the IRS. “Wofsy indicated to the informant that the one thousand dollars was part of a collection of forty-five hundred dollars, which he had obtained earlier that day from Stanley Levison,” a memo recounted.

Then, three weeks later, Jack told an FBI agent named Al Burlinson that Phil Bart had “completely relinquished control of CP National Office financial operations to Wofsy.” Burlinson explained in a memo, “This change in the financial set-up is due to friction between Bart and the Levisons, Stanley and Roy, who have control of CP business enterprises. The Levisons will continue to operate the business they now control, but will not expand their activities any further. They will hereafter turn over the profits of the en-



New York, February 7, 1964: Levison, King, and Jones outside the Park Sheraton Hotel

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terprises they control to Wofsy, and the latter will maintain regular contact with them.”

In mid-June, Jack told agents that Wofsy was still meeting Levison at least weekly, probably because Levison was holding a large portion of the Reserve Fund’s cash assets. The very next day Jack reported that Wofsy had come to him with \$10,000 in cash and had requested that Jack change it into smaller bills; Wofsy told Jack that he had gotten the money earlier that day from “a guy on Park Avenue,” and New York agents added, “It is believed the ‘guy on Park Avenue’ referred to Stanley Levison, who was observed meeting Wofsy on the morning of the above day by [New York Office] agents” in the same Forty-second Street subway corridor they had used so many times before.

At present the reprocessing and release of the Levison documents is stalled at the early fall of 1956, just a few weeks after a new bugging of Levison’s office was added to the FBI’s surveillance repertoire. But a combination of the heavily redacted documents released twenty years ago and some relatively cleaner ones processed two years ago (as part of the modest file on the civil-rights activist Ella J. Baker, a close colleague of Levison’s in 1956–1957) makes clear that evidence of Levison’s direct involvement in CPUSA financial affairs declined precipitously in late 1956 or very early 1957. In late March of 1957 the FBI dropped Levison from its list of “key figure” Communists, and on June 25 a redacted source—either Jack or Morris Childs—“advised that insofar as he has been able to determine, Stanley Levison and [redacted—no doubt Roy] are no longer involved in the CP Reserve Fund operation and have not been so involved since early 1957, or some time prior thereto. [redacted—Jack or Morris] stated that Stanley Levison is now a CP member with no official title, who performs his CP work through mass organization activity.”

Stanley Levison was forty-four years old when he first met the twenty-seven-year-old Martin Luther King Jr., in 1956. Stanley and Roy had grown up in Far Rockaway; Stanley attended the University of Michigan before obtaining two law degrees from St. John’s University, in Queens, in 1938 and 1939. Medically deferred from military service, he spent the war years managing New York tool-and-die firms—Unique Specialties Corporation and Colonial Tool and Machine—before buying the New Jersey Ford dealership in 1945 and then overseeing a host of import-export, property-management, and industrial-production companies whose overlapping relationships and countless financial transfers proved so complicated as to preclude any complete FBI analysis of Levison’s little empire. Divorced from his first wife in 1942, after a three-year marriage, Levison soon remarried, and by the mid-1950s was the father of a young son.

When Ella Baker and her fellow African-American civil-

rights activist Bayard Rustin introduced Levison to King, a special relationship quickly blossomed; from the late 1950s until King’s death, in 1968, it was without a doubt King’s closest friendship with a white person. In December of 1956 and January of 1957 Levison served as Rustin’s primary sounding board as Rustin drew up the founding-agenda documents for what came to be called the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Like Rustin, Levison, and Baker, King and a network of his southern African-American ministerial colleagues hoped that the SCLC could leverage the success of the Montgomery bus boycott into a South-wide attack on segregation and racial discrimination.

By April of 1957 Levison, like Rustin, was counseling King about the first major national address that King would deliver—from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, on May 17. Over the ensuing months Levison negotiated a book contract for King’s own account of the Montgomery boycott, *Stride Toward Freedom*, and then offered King line-by-line criticism and assistance in editing and polishing the book’s text. Levison also took charge of other tasks, ranging from writing King’s fundraising letters to preparing his tax returns.

King repeatedly offered Levison payment for his aid, but Levison firmly refused. He wrote King,

My skills were acquired not only in a cloistered academic environment, but also in the commercial jungle ... Although our culture approves, and even honors these practices, to me they were always abhorrent. Hence, I looked forward to the time when I could use these skills not for myself but for socially constructive ends. The liberation struggle is the most positive and rewarding area of work anyone could experience.

Those private comments to King may offer the best evidence available for fathoming the transition that Stanley Levison appears to have made during 1957.

Levison and King grew closer over the years, but neither of them could escape what Jack and Morris Childs had relayed to the FBI about Levison. The FBI approached Levison face-to-face in early 1960, asking if he would like to talk about what he knew, but Levison rebuffed the offer. Then, on January 4, 1962, Isadore Wofsy, with whom Levison apparently was still in direct touch, happened to tell Jack Childs that Levison had had a major hand in writing a speech that King had delivered to the AFL-CIO’s annual national convention a month earlier. Just four days later Attorney General Kennedy received notice from the FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover, that Levison, identified as “a member of the Communist Party, USA, ... is allegedly a close advisor to the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.”

Kennedy and his aide Burke Marshall, the assistant attorney general for civil rights, regarded the FBI’s information as both dependable and dangerous. They were told nothing of Jack or Morris except that the FBI’s informants were very well placed. But the pressing questions were about Levison

and King, not about the identity of the source. By early 1962 King was the leading symbol and spokesperson for the southern black freedom struggle. Levison, the FBI told Kennedy and Marshall, had recently installed as head of the SCLC's small New York office a young African-American man named Jack O'Dell, whose publicly documented record of affiliation with the CPUSA had drawn the attention of hostile congressional committees just a few years earlier. Kennedy's inner circle resolved that every Administration aide acquainted with King would warn him fervently but vaguely about the political danger of continuing his association with Levison and O'Dell. King politely accepted and then privately dismissed warning after warning.

Within weeks Kennedy had authorized the wiretapping of Levison's office; the FBI added a bug on its own authority. Neither source produced any evidence either of nefarious contacts or of a manipulative attitude toward King, but at the end of April, Levison found himself subpoenaed to appear before the segregationist James O. Eastland's Senate Internal Security Subcommittee. Levison testified under oath, "I am a loyal American and I am not now and never have been a member of the Communist Party," but he invoked the Fifth Amendment in response to all questions about the CPUSA and its financial affairs. To Levison's surprise, King's name was never raised at the committee session.

In mid-June the bug in Levison's office picked up his description of how he had recommended that King hire Jack O'Dell as his administrative assistant in Atlanta. Nothing had come of the idea, but for anyone who wanted to see an ulterior motive for Levison's commitment to King, the recommendation was suspect.

In late October of 1962 FBI leaks to friendly newspapers about O'Dell's presence at the SCLC resulted in news stories that led King to suggest falsely that O'Dell's employment was coming to an end. That evidence of King's tactical disingenuousness increased the disquiet within the Kennedy Justice Department; shortly thereafter the Attorney General approved a new FBI wiretap on Levison's home telephone.

But several months later, in March of 1963, when Jack Childs provided the FBI with ironclad evidence that Levison had explicitly severed whatever remaining ties he, Roy, and several old friends had still had with the CPUSA, the FBI conveyed that crucial news to absolutely no one outside the Bureau, not even the Attorney General. At a March 19 lunch with his old colleague Lem Harris, Levison said—as Harris recounted in a memo that Jack Childs passed on to the FBI—that "a whole group, formerly closely aligned with us, and over many years most generous and constant in their support," had now concluded that "the CP is 'irrelevant' and ineffective," and would supply no further support. The Harris memo was confirmed by what an FBI wiretap overheard Stanley telling Roy the very next day about his conversation with Harris: "I was tough, and I think I established my firm view, firm position."

Levison's break with the CPUSA was unknown to Burke Marshall, to Robert Kennedy, and to President John F. Kennedy when all three men reiterated to King in mid-June of 1963 that he must separate himself from Levison and O'Dell. Within days another leak to a newspaper revealing O'Dell's continued presence at the SCLC led King to announce O'Dell's resignation. Soon after that Levison himself, fully aware of the alarm that the Kennedys were voicing about him to King, told King that with Congress about to begin consideration of the Kennedys' landmark civil-rights bill, he and King had no choice but to put an end to direct contact with each other. "I induced him to break," Levison told the historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr. in 1976. "The movement needed the Kennedys too much. I said it would not be in the interests of the movement to hold on to me if the Kennedys had doubts."

Yet King remained reluctant to lose Levison's assistance and counsel, and thus he detailed a mutual friend, the young African-American attorney Clarence B. Jones, of New York, to serve as a telephonic intermediary between himself and Levison. Marshall and Robert Kennedy picked up on the ruse almost immediately, and within days Kennedy had authorized the wiretapping of Jones's home and office. Kennedy considered adding a tap on King as well, but decided to hold off.

In early August of 1963 King happened to stay at Jones's home for several days, at which point both the FBI and, by extension, the Kennedys were introduced to a new aspect of King's life—namely, his sexual endeavors, which in subsequent months would all but replace Levison as the focus of the FBI's surveillance of King. But at that time Marshall and Robert Kennedy were far more worried by the extensive evidence of King and Levison's communication by way of Jones. The wiretap in Jones's office recorded King asking for advice from "our friend" and apologizing for not calling him directly: "I'm trying to wait until things cool off—until this civil rights debate is over—as long as they may be tapping these phones, you know—but you can discuss that with him." Several weeks later Robert Kennedy authorized the wiretapping of King's home telephone, in Atlanta; a wiretap on the SCLC office telephones followed a few days afterward.

The FBI's wiretaps on King's telephones remained in place until April of 1965 (at home) and June of 1966 (at the office); the wiretapping of Stanley Levison continued until several years after King's assassination, on April 4, 1968. Transcripts from the Levison tap attest to what a valuable, insightful, and influential friend Stanley Levison remained to King right up to King's death.

The transcripts from the wiretaps on King and his advisers also answer a question that came to preoccupy President Lyndon Johnson just as it had the Kennedy brothers and J. Edgar Hoover: Was Martin Luther King Jr.

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any kind of Communist sympathizer? Of course not—but the FBI never passed along to Johnson or to anyone else what King said to Bayard Rustin one day in early May of 1965, when the SCLC was tussling with the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee over a public statement proclaiming movement unity: “There are things I wanted to say renouncing Communism in theory but they would not go along with it. We wanted to say that it was an alien philosophy contrary to us but they wouldn’t go along with it.” Instead the FBI continued to distribute utterly misleading reports that declared just the opposite; as one newly released CIA summary from just a few weeks before King’s death asserts, “According to the FBI, Dr. King is regarded in Communist circles as ‘a genuine Marxist-Leninist who is following the Marxist-Leninist line.’”

Stanley Levison died in September of 1979, without ever honestly acknowledging just how far his political journey had gone. Levison was never forthcoming about what he had been before 1957, just as the FBI was never forthcoming about what he no longer was after 1957. Levison died without ever learning that it was his old CPUSA comrades Jack and Morris Childs who had precipitated the FBI’s surveillance of his friendship with King.

The Childs brothers went on to many other exploits in the years after they last saw Stanley Levison: they reopened the CPUSA’s financial pipeline to Moscow, and at the FBI’s behest they oversaw the delivery of millions of dollars from the Kremlin to the otherwise utterly moribund CPUSA. (To the FBI, the only thing better than no American Communist Party was a Communist Party effectively controlled by the Bureau.) Throughout the 1960s and 1970s Morris and Jack traveled the globe as the CPUSA’s international ambassadors. In Moscow on November 22, 1963, Morris witnessed and attested to the utter shock and dismay of the Soviet Union’s top leaders at the assassination of John F. Kennedy; after returning from a visit to Havana six months later, Jack passed along Fidel Castro’s comments to him about the Kennedy assassination. Jack and Morris represented a huge intelligence coup. The firsthand information they provided to the FBI about Stanley Levison’s secret financial work for the CPUSA in the years before Levison became Martin Luther King’s most important political counselor changed American history in a profound way. If the Childs brothers had never signed on with the FBI, or if Jack had not heard about his old comrade Levison’s newfound friendship with Martin Luther King, the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations would most likely have embraced both King and the entire southern black freedom struggle far more warmly than they did. ▀

David J. Garrow is the author of Bearing the Cross, a biography of Martin Luther King Jr., which won a 1987 Pulitzer Prize, and The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From “Solo” to Memphis (1981).

Edward Sorel and Nancy Caldwell Sorel live in Manhattan. Their First Encounters series, which ran in The Atlantic for twelve years, was published as a collection in 1994.

INCIDENT REPORT

Richard I and Saladin

.....

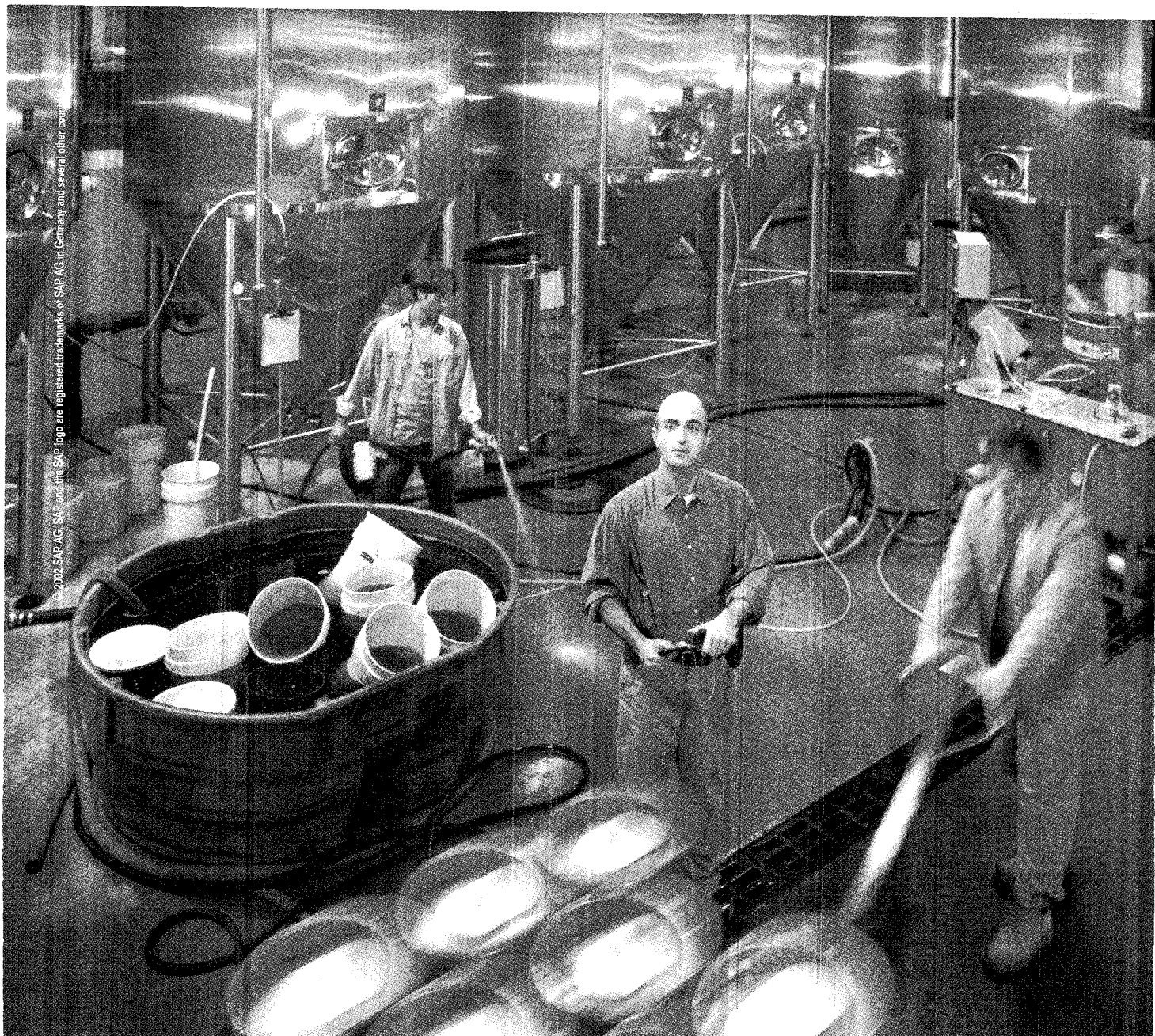
Richard I of England was a man of contradictions. There was his warring side: as a scrappy sixteen-year-old he had (in connivance with his brothers) led an army in a (failed) revolt against his father, Henry II; later Richard fought those same brothers and then defeated his father’s forces on the battlefield. So much for the twelfth-century chivalric code of loyalty. Still, Richard excelled in the poetry of courtly love, and sang his *chansons* in the best troubadour style. Tall, fair, and exceedingly handsome, he looked the role of the “parfit gentil knight.” But after word of the Muslim recapture of Jerusalem, in 1187, reached England, Richard, now king, dropped both duties and pleasures and took the vow of the Third Crusade.

The new conqueror was Saladin, the principal warrior of Islam—a Kurd raised at court in Damascus, and no stranger to the concept of chivalry. Prominent in the defeat of Egypt, he had, in time, proclaimed himself sultan. Later, at Jerusalem, he overwhelmed his enemies: “Arrows fell like raindrops,” one Christian wrote. But Saladin welcomed a foe of Richard’s stature, even as he recognized the need for caution. Hereditary monarchs like Richard could lose every battle and still retain power, but Saladin must lead his men to victory, or they would desert him.

After Acre, Richard the Crusader’s first victory, that champion of Christianity beheaded some 2,700 infidels, including whole families. But as the sultan took his stand at the walls of the holy city, the king pondered. Even if he won back the prize, his men would never stay to hold it. Saladin could wait it out, but Richard must return home. Maybe there was another way to leave his mark. *Instead of slaughtering the infidel, why not integrate him? Neutralize the holy sites! Open Jerusalem to pilgrims of every faith! Establish separate Muslim and Christian areas in other towns, and live peaceably together!* He sent his proposal to Saladin, who assented, betting on a rejection by the other Crusaders. They were horrified.

A year passed. The restive English king was preparing to go home when, on August 5, 1192, Saladin made a surprise assault on Jaffa. His forces depleted, Richard could field only 2,000 men and fifteen horses against a Turkish cavalry of 7,000. Still, he galloped to the front, sword slashing left and right. Saladin, directing the attack from the rear, watched in admiration. Suddenly he saw Richard’s horse fall under him. The sultan of infidels never hesitated. In an impulsive, magnanimous gesture, he grabbed the reins of his two best horses and ordered his groom to rush them to the Christian king. —NANCY CALDWELL SOREL





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THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY

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A SPACE IN TIME

.....
BY MICHAEL BENSON

Photos edited and enhanced by the author

Click for the universe ... Your home computer, thanks to the windows that NASA has poked in space, is the site of the greatest show on earth. A deskbound cosmic pilgrim beckons us to an available sublimity

“Preoccupied as we are ... with developing the absolute speed of our *real-time* transmission tools, we too often forget the comparable historical importance of this other limit—speed, the one which has enabled us to escape the *real space* of our planet and so to ‘fall upwards.’”

—PAUL VIRILIO

The volcanic moon Io (previous page) floats above Jupiter in this picture taken by the Cassini spacecraft on January 1, 2001. Photo courtesy Jet Propulsion Laboratory

In the evenings, when my particular piece of Earth has turned away from the Sun, and is exposed instead to the rest of the cosmos, I sit in front of a keyboard, log on, and seek out the windows that look down at the planets and out at the stars. It's a markedly different experience from looking at reproductions on paper. What I see is closer to the source. In fact, it's indistinguishable from the source. These are images that have never registered on a negative. Like the Internet itself, they are products of a digitized era. Over the past couple of years I've been monitoring the long rectangular strips of Martian surface being beamed across the void, in a steady stream of zeroes and ones, from the umbrella-shaped high-gain antenna of the *Mars Global Surveyor* spacecraft. These pictures are so fresh that their immediacy practically crackles. Call it “chrono-clarity.” That bluish wispy cloud, for example, hovering over the Hecates Tholus volcano, which rears above the pockmarked surface of the Elysium Volcanic Region in the Martian eastern hemisphere—it has barely had time to disperse before I, or anyone with Internet access, can see it in all its spooky beauty. The volcano emerges from the pink Martian desert, which looks organic and impressionable—like human skin, or the surface of a clay pot before firing. The tenuous cloud floats near the volcano's mouth, as if in prelude to an eruption. It's a picture composed of millions of dots and dashes of data, produced by a transmission technique just a few steps removed from Morse code; but it reveals a landscape the likes of which Samuel Morse, let alone the ranks of Earth-based astronomers who have surveyed the planets since well before Babylonian times, could scarcely have envisioned.

In case there was any doubt, many of those good old science-fiction predictions from the 1950s and the 1960s are coming true. “NEW SQUAD OF ROBOTS READY TO ASSAULT MARS” read a 1998 headline in the online *Houston Chronicle*, stirring submerged memories of my adolescent readings of Isaac Asimov's *I, Robot* stories. But Asimov's sentient robots were frequently confused. Something always seemed to be going wrong with them, and the mayhem that followed could inevitably be traced back to a programming error by their human handlers—a situation not unfamiliar to those running NASA's Mars program, which was temporarily grounded after a catastrophic pair of failures in late 1999. (The *Mars Climate Orbiter* was lost owing to the stark failure by one group of engineers to translate another group's figures into metric units of measurement, and the *Mars Polar Lander* because for some unfathomable reason its landing gear hadn't been adequately tested.)

For all their formidable prescience, Asimov and his contemporaries Arthur C. Clarke and Robert Heinlein didn't quite conjure up that still-startling compound of populist forum, deep archive, and global amphitheater called the Internet. I picture a packed arena of Romans, teeming and kaleidoscopic, at the height of

the empire. They're savoring the gods'-eye view, watching the Red Planet turn.¹ Would they have seen it as territory to conquer? Would they have sent in the legions? Mars, after all, was named after the Roman god of war, the father of Romulus and Remus. And what about our age—which way, in the end, will we go? “Earth is the cradle of the mind,” said the pioneering Russian space-flight theorist Konstantin Tsiolkovsky. “But we cannot live in a cradle forever.”

A low hum resounds from the tiny fan recessed in my computer—a propeller venting warmth from the machinery of virtual travel. With rusty Martian sand dunes still undulating across the screen, I notice that outside, the Moon is rising over subzero Central Europe. The city below it is quiet, subdued under snow. Beyond brick smokestacks a familiar cool light defines the icy sphere. A ghostly mass of battered rock, Earth's satellite is an archetypal solar-system object, with surface features echoing those of many of the planets and moons arrayed in far-flung archipelagos around the Sun. But it's much more than that—at least in the human context. The longer one considers it, the more its tidal influence grows. Without that luminescent lure would there even have been a pull to leave this planet?

Deciding to take a closer look, I accelerate away from Mars and shoot thirty years into the past—descending rapidly through the strata of the *Apollo* archives. I quickly find an excellent picture of a three-quarters moon, taken by a large-format mapping camera during one of the later manned missions, in the early 1970s.² Almost the entire ravaged face is visible, with tactile gradations of surface texture readily apparent—craters edging gradually toward the terminator, that endlessly migratory line between day and night, and into darkness. There's a three-dimensional, convex quality to the image. But it looks somehow odd. I realize that I'm looking down at a lunar surface divided between the side always oriented toward Earth—the face with a face, so to speak—and the far side. Two of the familiar eastern mares, or seas, are situated here on the left side of the picture—in the hemisphere visible from Earth. On the right, facing deep space, well east of the immense circular basin of Mare Crisium, the battered back of the Moon is submerged in elongated shadows.

Suddenly, with a kind of vertigo, I sense the home planet, way off past the left border of the picture—and even myself, somewhere down there, at the age of ten, maybe looking up at the exact moment the shutter fell on *Apollo 16*. I'm frozen in that same clockwork flux generated by the spheres as they move inexorably through space. Looking out the window again (here, now, a traveler on a winter's night), I realize that the Moon is in exactly the same phase.

Between self, screen, and window, a kind of temporal triangulation. And what am I doing now, if not the same thing as then? Looking up, “just” in time.

When I return to Earth, it's always to Ljubljana. As far as most of my New York friends are concerned, I already live in outer space. Slovenia has never exactly been at the center of things. It's not even at the center of that nebulous interzone called Central Europe. I came to this tiny nation of two million alpine Slavs shortly after its dangerous secession from Yugoslavia, in the summer of 1991. Ten days of intermittent, partisan-style war against the federal army had devolved into an uneasy cease-fire, periodically shattered by the rolling kettle-drum crash of MiGs breaking the sound barrier overhead. But the army soon withdrew, rumbling southeast toward Croatia and Bosnia, with a kind of murderous, humiliated gleam in its eye. It left behind an independent—and remarkably unscathed—new country.

I moved to this fringe of the disastrous Balkans to make a film. When I finally finished, four years later, I remained based in Hapsburg-perfect Ljubljana while I took the resulting movie—called *Predictions of Fire*—to festivals all over

¹ See NASA's *Planetary Photojournal*, at photojournal.jpl.nasa.gov/, and NASA's Mars exploration homepage, at mars.jpl.nasa.gov/

² See antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap981008.html and the *Apollo Lunar Surface Journal*, at www.hq.nasa.gov/alsj/frame.html. Also, see www.apolloarchive.com

**“What we observe is
not nature itself, but
nature exposed to
our method of
questioning.”**

—WERNER HEISENBERG

the world. Meanwhile, I got involved in various projects and lives. Then I got married—and eventually had a son. The time never seemed right to move back to New York. Without quite realizing it, I had become an expatriate.

But it didn't take me long to discover that it was possible to go even further out. In the spring of 1995, on the early color monitor of a used IBM clone, the World Wide Web blinked to life on my desktop for the first time. I quickly proceeded past the novelty of being able to read *The New York Times* while most of Manhattan slept, and discovered a way of looking through the “windows” of crewless spacecraft—vessels that have seen Earth dwindle to the size of a pearl, and then a pixel, as they voyaged far beyond any place ever directly observed by human beings. *Very* far beyond.

It takes only the briefest of Net-mediated shunts, in other words, to vault from the slate-gray drainpipes and cracked flagstones of Vrhovceva Street No. 4 and through the open window of escape velocity—25,000 miles per hour. The procedure is silent, with none of the countdown, dazzle, and roar we associate with rocket propulsion. But it works flawlessly nonetheless. And once one has escaped Earth's gravity, the universe unfolds, revealing vistas across space and time so multi-faceted, so replete with the unlikely, the mysterious, and the awe-inspiring, that it's astonishing that the whole procedure can be channeled through the good offices of a local phone call.

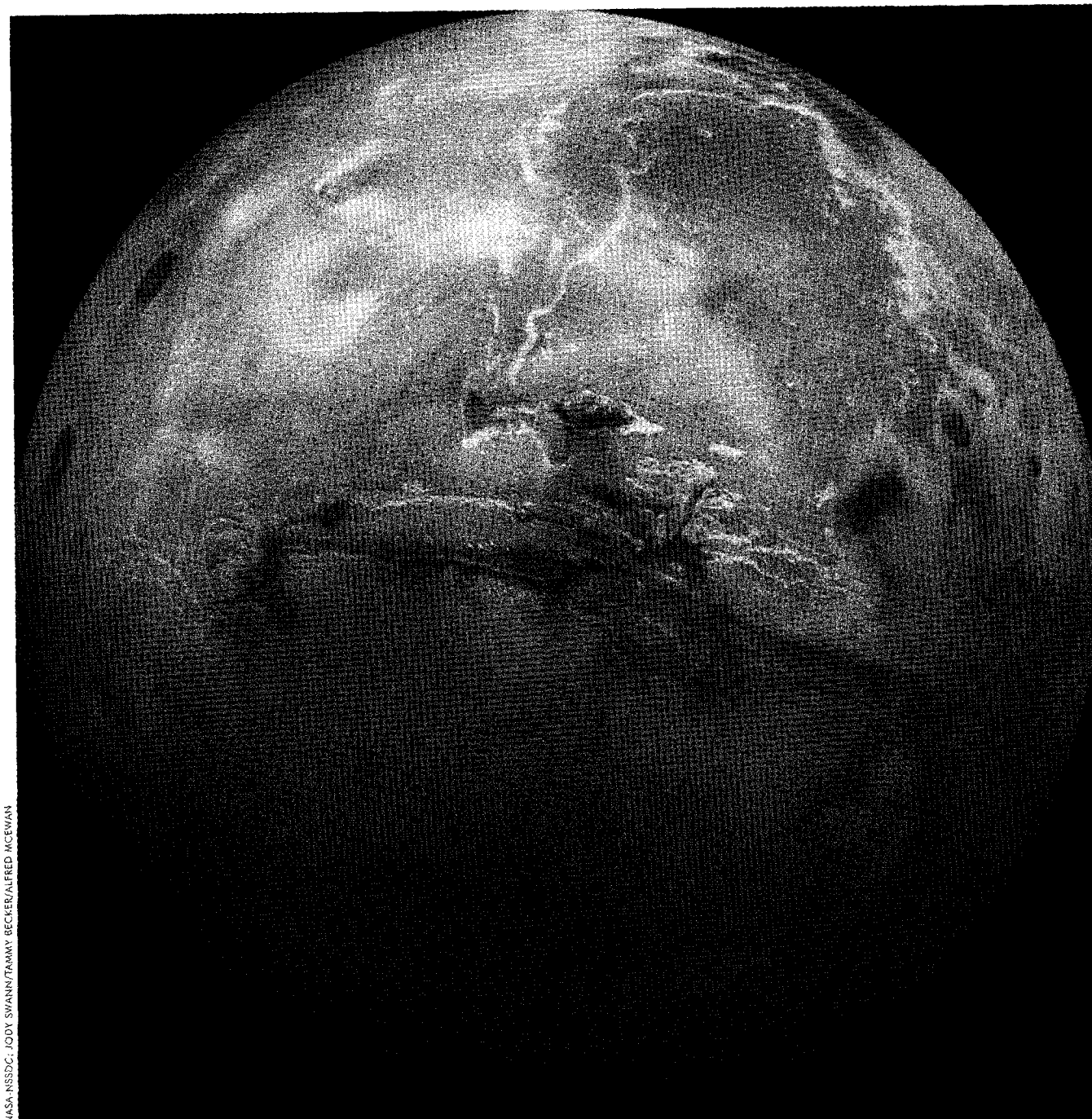
Suddenly, on the screen as in reality, I saw the whole story—the human and even the post-human story—delineated against a vast, starry black backdrop. Forget the astronauts, marooned in low Earth orbit for three decades. A continual remote-controlled extension of boundaries is under way. Intricate space probes—encased in scarabaeoid shells, festooned with scopes and scanners, and driven by solar-powered cells and radio-isotope thermo-electric generators—are redefining the limits of human knowledge. Deployed at the perimeter, they're casting wide-eyed glances and making sophisticated measurements, well past any terra incognita where sea monsters once seethed through oceans pouring off the rim of a flat planet.

Pretty soon I was hooked. I began compulsively monitoring the progress of our space-faring machines.

That moon, rising implacably over Ljubljana, has long since ceded center stage. It defined the first act, but now it's a cameo, backlit by the immense universe beyond. It played its role well, though, using its small gravitational field to full advantage, gradually reeling the species off Earth to have a look around. At the beginning of the fifth decade of space travel the various tools for that investigation have increased their power in exponential jumps. What they're looking at is astonishing in its depth and diversity.

NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, which is in charge of all American unmanned missions, is keeping tabs on a record number of space probes these days. They include the joint NASA-European Space Agency solar observatory, which has been producing amazing stop-motion films of quakes and tornadoes on the Sun for more than six years now, and the giant two-story spacecraft *Cassini*, which has been threading a circuitous course toward Saturn ever since its launch, in October of 1997.³ *Cassini* swung past Venus twice, picking up gravity-assisted momentum each time, and then boomeranged around Earth again on its seven-year flight to the ringed planet. On January 1 of last year the probe sent home one of the most beautiful color photographs ever taken of Jupiter and its companion moon Io (see page 91). A behemoth compared with most of the other new probes, *Cassini* was designed well before the advent of the “faster, better, cheaper” doctrine that the former NASA administrator Daniel S. Goldin introduced, with some fanfare, in the early 1990s. This low-

³See sohowww.nascom.nasa.gov/ and saturn.jpl.nasa.gov/cassini/index.shtml



NASA-NSDC; JODY SWANN/TAMMY BECKER/ALFRED MCEWAN

budget management philosophy, seemingly not applicable to the half-billion-per-blastoff space shuttle, let alone the financially troubled International Space Station, requires that spacecraft cost less than \$150 million and go from the drawing board to the launch pad in thirty-six months or less. It has been under heavy bureaucratic scrutiny recently, owing to the loss of those two Mars probes in 1999.

Still, NASA's Discovery-class missions were run according to this doctrine, and the program has racked up some real successes. They include *Global Surveyor*, which recently completed a photographic map of the Red Planet to rival the best we have of Earth, and *Pathfinder*, which created something of a media sensation back in 1997. *Pathfinder* bounced down on the Martian surface using a set of inflated air bags, the first time such a landing method had been attempted. It then opened its multiple petals like a mechanized flower and proceeded to roll

Mars from a distance of 1,500 miles. The jagged gash at the center is the Valles Marineris, a canyon as wide as the continental United States. The canyon is named after its discoverer, the 1971 Mariner 9 probe

out a telegenic, insectoid little rover named *Sojourner*—without a doubt the most charismatic unmanned vehicle in NASA history.

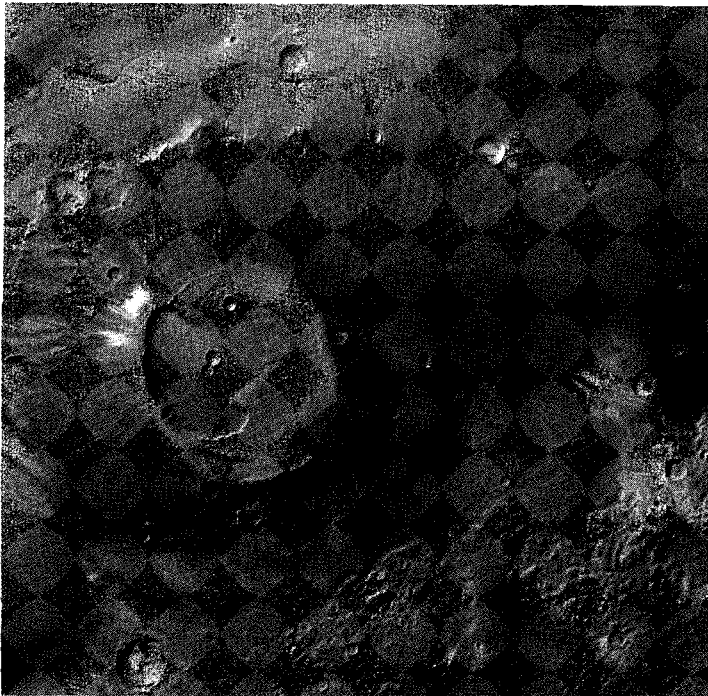
In early 2000, in an event largely ignored by the mainstream media, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory eased a Discovery probe called *NEAR* (for *Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous*) into orbit around a twenty-one-mile-long peanut-shaped, methodically tumbling rock called Eros. *NEAR* was the first spacecraft ever to orbit an asteroid—no inconsiderable feat of celestial navigation, given that Eros has a gravity field so weak that an astronaut on its surface could reach escape velocity by simply jumping off. A year later project scientists maneuvered the probe to within a few hundred yards of its subject and then directed it to touch down gently. *NEAR* thus became the first spacecraft to land on an asteroid.⁴

NEAR hasn't performed flawlessly. Not unlike an adolescent confronting the object of his or her erotic fascination for the first time, the spacecraft suddenly flipped out during its initial approach to Eros, in December of 1998. Cut off

from communication with Earth, acting on its own, the probe's computer managed to re-orient the spinning craft. But by the time the JPL flight engineers had figured out what went wrong, they were forced to send their charge all the way around the Sun again—a year-long trajectory—for another try.

They wouldn't have been able to do so if *NEAR* hadn't straightened up and flown right all by itself. There's something fascinating about the increasing autonomy of these robots with which we're populating the heavens. In late fall an e-mail came to me from the JPL—something again automatic, sent through that other universe, the one made of innumerable routers and chips. It announced the launch of the first unmanned spacecraft capable of making many of its own decisions regarding its orientation vis-à-vis Earth. The phrasing itself was intriguing—even if we were not yet talking about *political* orientation. If I didn't know better, I might have begun to suspect that a kind of baton-passing was taking place, far beyond the atmosphere. From flesh-and-blood *us* to nuts-and-bolts *them*. Science fiction?

Sifting through a self-congratulatory final press release archived at the *Mars Pathfinder* site, I was suddenly, unexpectedly, moved. Contact with the lander was lost, it said, in early



Apollinaris Patera, an isolated volcano near the Martian equator, is thought to be almost three miles high

October of 1997. That was after nearly three months of continuous operation—much longer than expected. The loss of communication was attributed to the failure of the lander's battery, which in turn cut power to the heater. "After that," the text read, "the lander would begin getting colder at night and go through much deeper day-night thermal cycles. Eventually, the cold or the cycling would probably render the lander inoperable."

But little *Sojourner* is almost entirely solar-powered. It was just as animated as ever when all contact with Earth was lost. I came across the following sentence: "The health and status of the rover is ... unknown, but ... it is probably circling the vicinity of the lander, attempting to communicate with it."

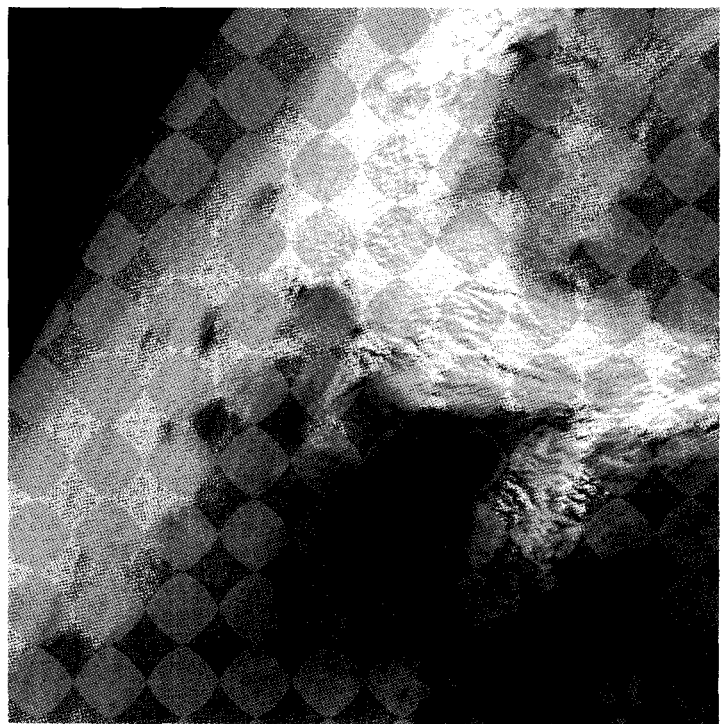
The poignancy of it! The pathos! Powered forever by the inexhaustible Sun, impervious to the cold, *Sojourner* may to this day be wearing grooves in that ochreous desert floor. And we've forgotten our cybernetic creation, literally leaving it to its own devices. Having chipped, hammered, glued, and then welded and screwed together the matter we're surrounded with, we've finally endowed it with eyes, ears, and a capacity for self-direction—something like early life itself. We've propelled it at extreme velocities to distances that redefine how far human artifacts can go. And we've left it to circle, or even to beeline out of the solar system—still seeking orders, still trying to communicate with us.

NASA/USGS

A few years ago I happened to be scrolling along the bone-dry branchings of a newly discovered Martian riverbed when a small headline started winking on and off like an insistent neon sign, advertising a live feed of the *Mars Polar Lander* launch. I steered my arrow over to the Real Player icon next to it and clicked. A simulated TV set unfolded itself, *voilà*, in the browser window. The thing was approximately the size of a matchbox. From the virtuality of television to the next stage: the TV itself becomes virtual. This miniature screen-within-a-screen filled with what appeared to be a close-up of Earth's surface: not grass and soil, or the heaving Pacific, but staggered gray concrete and an elaborate web of girders, ramps, and drifting smoke. Evidently the camera was mounted on the lower stage of a rocket. I was looking directly down at Cape Canaveral launch pad 17B.

A tinny countdown issued forth from my computer's speakers, and I watched the grainy yet kinetic, comically Lilliputian live launch of that ill-fated robotic mission. Tongues of bright-orange flame flared out, filling the bottom of my stamp-flat TV. The ground rushed away, rapidly becoming coastline and then cloudscape. I clicked on the magnifying-glass icon to enlarge the toy picture, which expanded to fill half the screen. The image now verged on abstraction, a scramble of "compression protocols" trying frantically to keep up with the fast-paced reality of a rocket blasting through the sound barrier and out of the atmosphere *just like that*. The arc of Earth's limb appeared—immediately recognizable, as if coded in ancestral memory. Sixty-six seconds after liftoff four pencil-shaped solid-fuel boosters separated from the Delta II rocket and fell gracefully away, trailing streamers of smoke as they spiraled back toward Florida. The curved horizon was defined by the inky blackness of space.

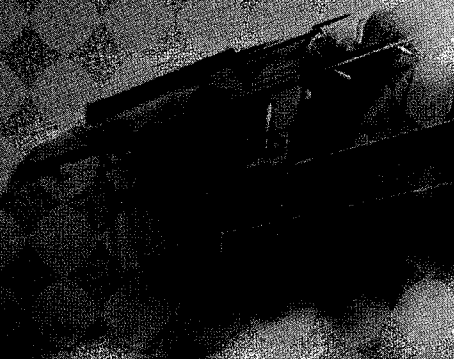
Ironically, this image of our home planet had a far lower resolution than do the crisp pictures *Surveyor* has been wiring back from Mars. That's because time had been added to space; it was, at least nominally, a motion picture, and a live one at that. Fascinated by this example of technique chasing technology, of software trailing hardware, I watched our pixelated planet, a spinning blue globe forced continually to reassemble itself as blocks of Atlantic cloud moved lumpily forward. Data coursed through the modem with a barely discernible thrumming sound, something like the *bummm* of a hummingbird's wings. Four and a half minutes into the flight the horizon suddenly rose again, now in a free-wheeling spin. The lower stage of the rocket—the one with the camera—had fallen away. Then there was nothing but micro-miniaturized TV static: "snow" twice removed. The probe would soon reach escape velocity. The feed was over. We human beings had been left far behind. Not for the first time.



A Viking 2 picture of a dust storm, almost 800 miles wide, sweeping over the Thaumasia region of Mars

Stubbornly refusing re-entry to Earth, I raced ahead of the new probe to Mars orbit again, where I looked down at the grandest canyon in the solar system—a jagged 2,500-mile-long gash that could easily span most of the continental United States. This is Valles Marineris, named after its discoverer, the 1971 *Mariner 9* probe. In the past five years *Surveyor* has zoomed up close on the eroded rim of this immense canyon, which at points is more than six miles deep. The resolution of these pictures is so good that scientists could easily spot, say, a small concession stand set up at the rim of Noctis Labyrinthus, the complex series of connected rift valleys defining the canyon's western periphery. Coke? Fries? Oxygen? Huge ancient river channels begin from Valles Marineris and run north. Many of them lead to the boulder-strewn floodplains of Chryse

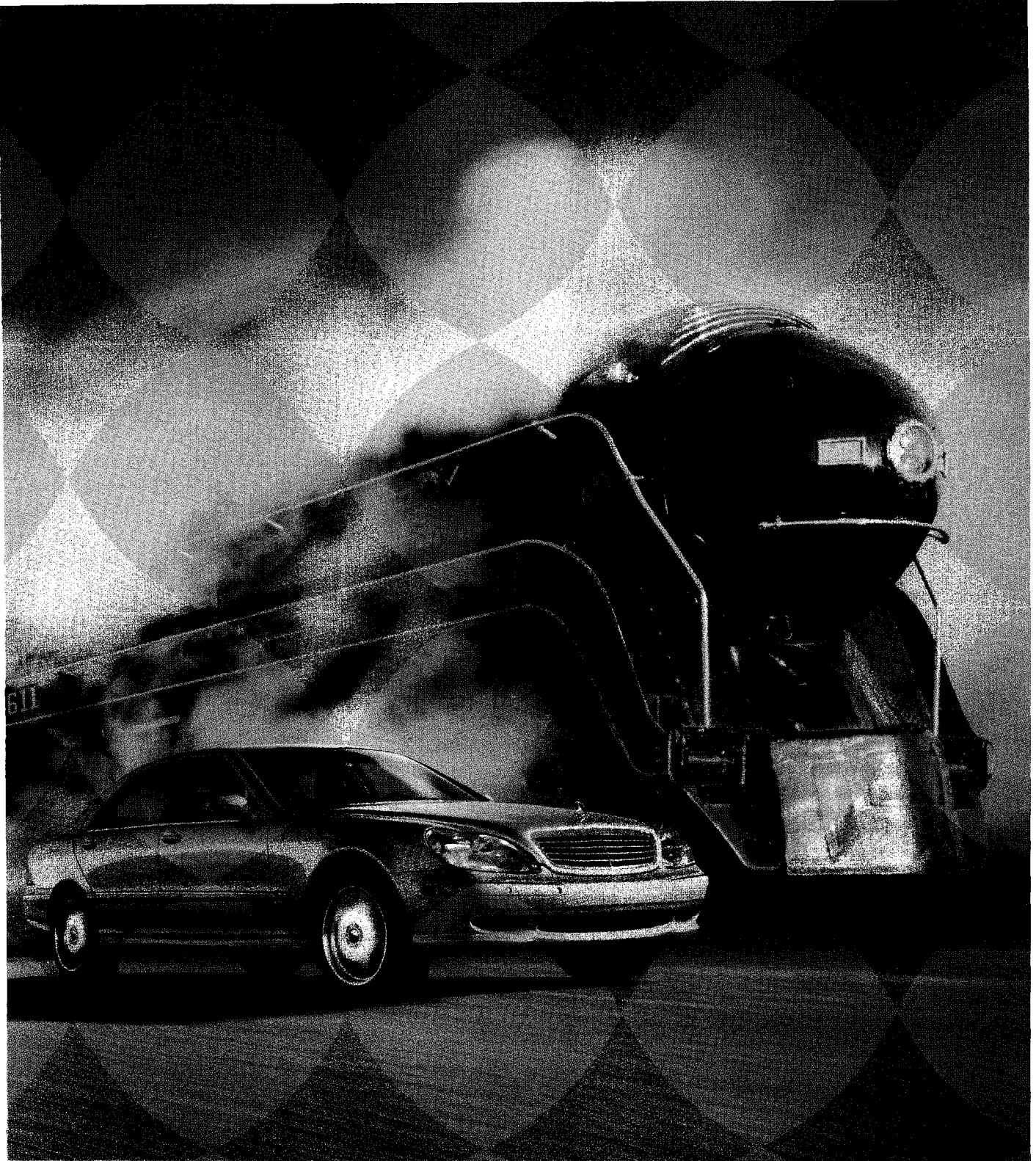
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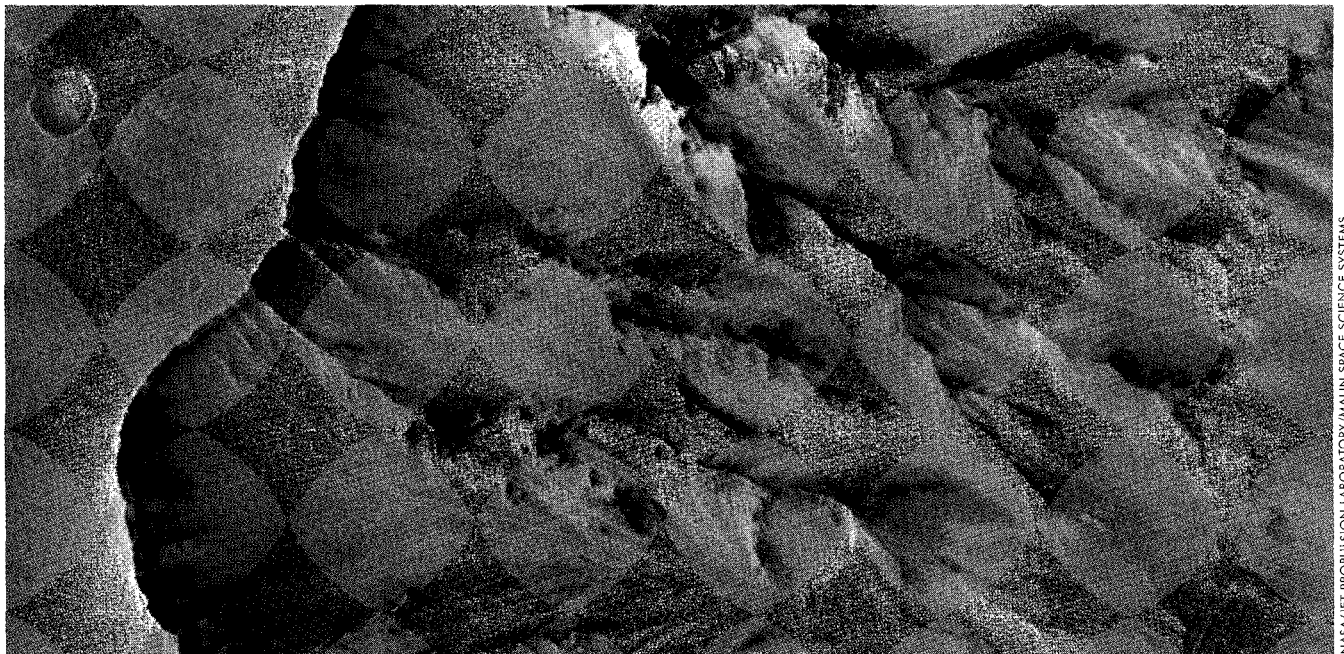
Basin—the landing site of both *Viking I*, which set down in 1976, and *Pathfinder*, which bounced to a halt, beach-ball style, some twenty years later.

I scrutinized the image produced as *Surveyor* moved across the canyon's northern edge. A small impact crater was clearly visible near the rim, as perfect as a drop of rainwater captured a split second after hitting a lake. Although this area otherwise looks as dry as dust, in April and May of 2000 startling images of the Gorgonum Chaos region in the Martian southern hemisphere revealed what appeared to be recently formed gullies snaking through twisted terrain. Indistinguishable from similar formations on Earth, of the kind that form always and only above groundwater, they seem to indicate an aquifer only a few hundred yards beneath the surface.

And this, of course, is not something one scribbles furtively at the end of a paragraph, hoping nobody will notice. After hundreds of years of fruitless observation from Earth, followed by three decades of robot flybys, orbiters, and three successful remote landings on the surface, it took the eagle-eyed, low-budget *Global Surveyor* to finally divine water on Mars. Eureka!

Cazing down at the luminous buttes and mesas of Valles Marineris, an almost familiar landscape creepy in its emptiness of even the faintest flicker of life, I remembered driving in the summer of 1996 from Arizona's Meteor Crater—the best-preserved impact crater on Earth—to the edge of the Grand Canyon: a place where the Europeans settling the New World came face to face for the first time with a geological past so deep that it called biblical chronology into question. One reason the Grand Canyon became so symbolically important to the United States was that it served as a geologically eloquent stand-in for the young country's missing cultural history. (Native Americans, of course, didn't figure.) I wonder if it's a coincidence that this nation—now able to boast the longest continuous form of government on Earth—is centuries later expending the effort and resources to explore new, even more spectacular places where nature bears no trace of human history.

Nature, they say, abhors a vacuum. But the reference is really to humanity, always rushing in with its gizmos and interpretations. Maybe the serrated walls of that Martian canyon exist as an antipode to the ones in Arizona. Maybe that chasm at the center of American iconography is mirrored from above by Valles Marineris—a place signifying not a country's past but its future. Not the last frontier but the next one.



Probably the fact that I've moved around the globe for much of a lifetime has encouraged my tendency to place things in a cosmic perspective. Reportedly, the handful of astronauts who bounced across the Moon thirty years ago could sense, even at ground level, that they were on a sphere. The horizon looked too close. It also sloped downward, subtly but visibly, in a strange and airless clarity. Being raised in a Foreign Service family, as I was, can produce a similar effect on this planet. Give yourself a multiplicity of camera angles, in enough time zones, and eventually the sky becomes the sole common denominator.

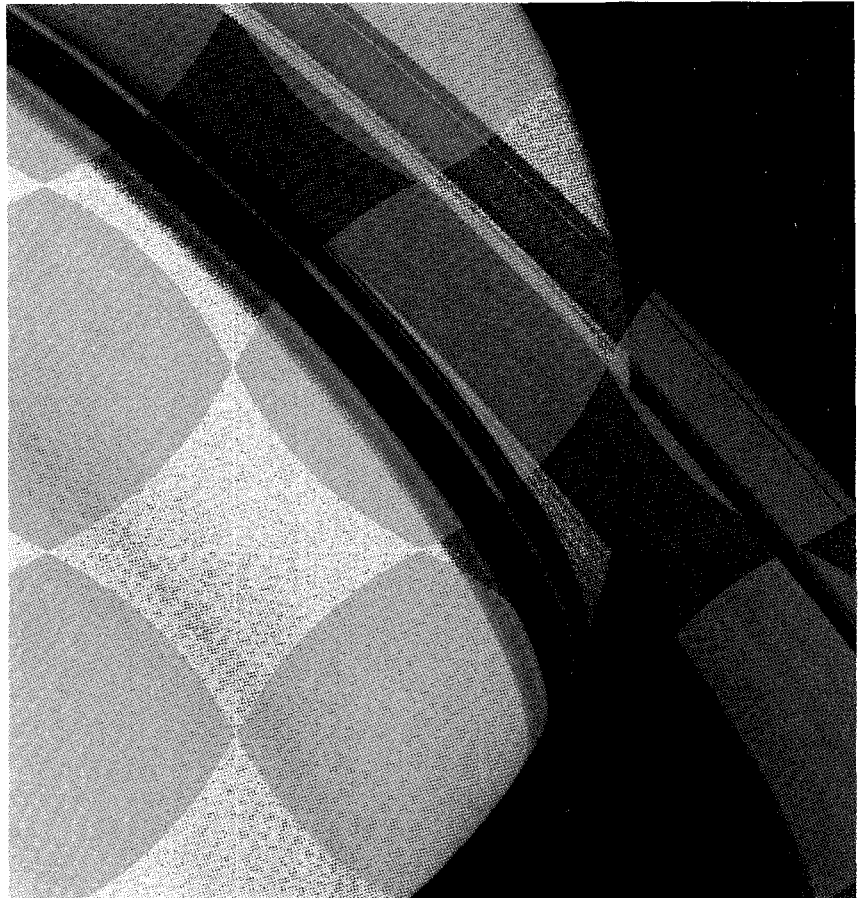
A chain of cities unreels in my memory like a roll of archival film. I rewind to Ankara, Turkey, in the mid-seventies: An acrid pall shrouds the minarets. The city has some of the worst air pollution on Earth. Each room of our large house has an electrostatic air-cleaner; an army of plastic wood-grained boxes tries mightily to zap particulates before they reach our soft American lungs. But this brown haze is winter coal smoke. In the spring the stars blink and wheel high over the Balgat hills, pristine and clear in the thin, dry Anatolian air. For my twelfth birthday I am given a telescope. Out on the darkened lawn I point this tube—a device practically indistinguishable from the one Galileo Galilei built in the winter of 1609—up at the glinting night sky. Like that heretic Pisan, I rapidly discover a number of important things: The Moon is a cratered, mountainous body. The Milky Way is composed of innumerable individual stars. Jupiter, faintly striped, is attended by four stars—spread out in a thin line parallel to its bulging equator.

Several nights later I observe Jupiter again. Those “stars” have changed their positions, relative to the planet and to one another. They're the Galilean moons.

Nothing, however, prepares me for the sheer aesthetic pleasure of Saturn. How, in all creation, could such an object have come about? Clearly visible in their weightless tilt, as symmetrical as something made by the most precise of machine tools from the cleanest of mathematical models on the largest lathe in the galaxy, the multiple rings encircling this improbable object redefine what nature is capable of. Saturn is more beautiful than anything I have ever seen on Earth. It is a presentation, live and uncut, of cosmic perfection.

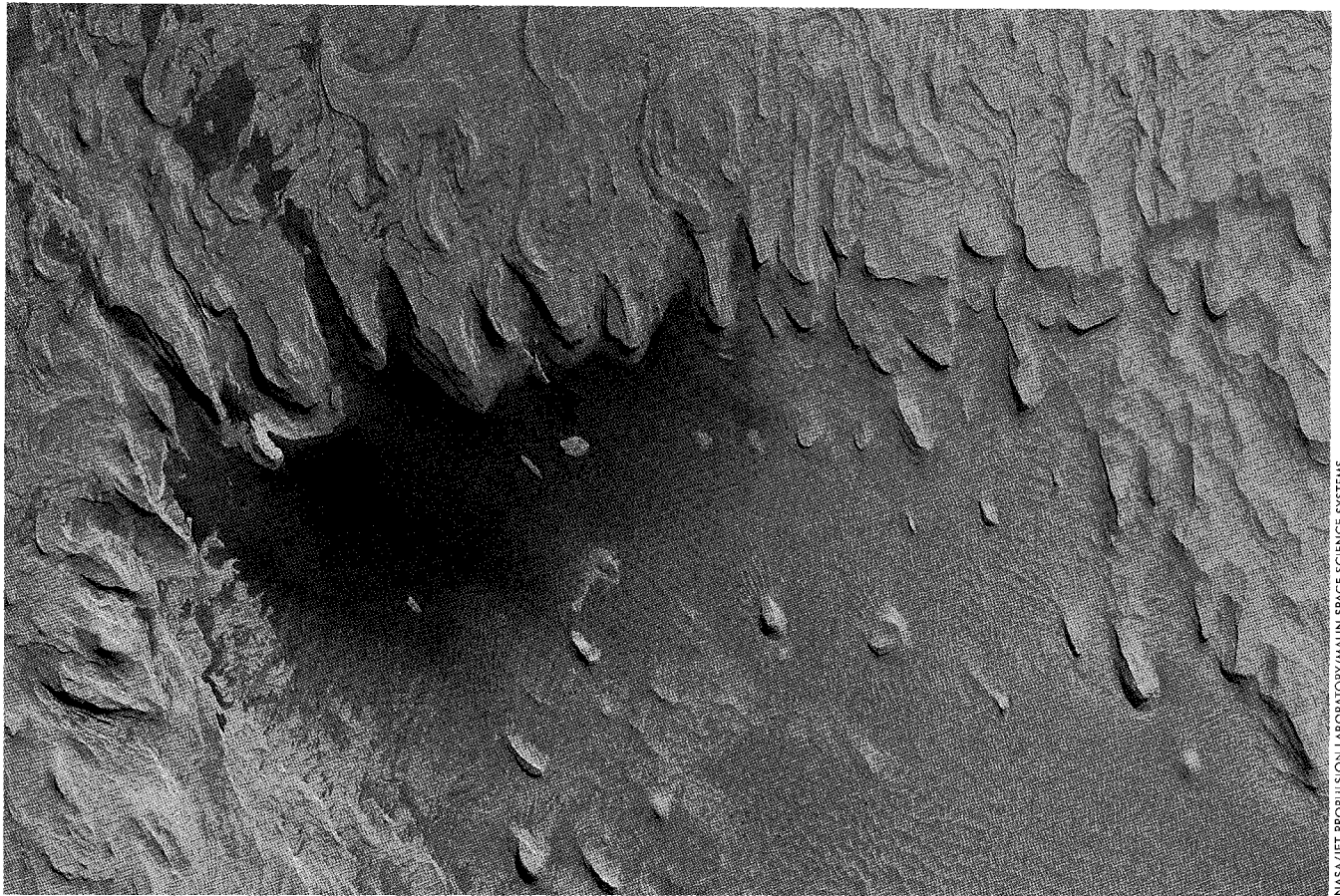
I pull eye from eyepiece and look down at the telescope's white barrel in amazement. Technology may produce a haze to choke cities. It may leak crude into the oceans. But it has also unveiled a universe made of glittering jewels.

Hurting effortlessly along the cyberspaceways more than two decades later, I monitor blinking readouts and order micro-circuitry and inter-linked telecommunications devices to navigate among the planets and the stars. Never before have such solitary, self-directed voyages into deep space been possible. Even the lunar explorers, those who actually broke free of Earth and traveled to another world, were slaves to their schedules and their uncompromising hierarchies of command. Opportunities to simply gaze out the window, to allow the experience to register in the soul, were few and far between. Many, when they returned, retained only sketchy, disembodied memories of what they



(Above) Saturn's immaculate ring system, which is made up of boulders and dust, and is probably the detritus of a shattered moon

(Opposite) A Mars Global Surveyor image revealing detail in Coprates Chasma, part of the Valles Marineris



NASA/JET PROPULSION LABORATORY/MALIN SPACE SCIENCE SYSTEMS

A Mars Global Surveyor image, taken in 2001, showing the floor of an impact crater near the Martian equator. Layers of uniform thickness suggest that the materials are ancient sediments, deposited by either water or wind. Dark sand drifts are visible, as are lighter, wind-blown ripples

had experienced. My journeys may not be actual, but they do give me plenty of time to mull over what I've seen through the portholes.

In May of 2001, a year definitively marked for space by Stanley Kubrick and Arthur C. Clarke in their film of the same name, I discovered that my personal space-exploration method had been validated by none other than the National Research Council, which recommended that an initial \$60 million be allocated to create a "national virtual observatory." With the quantity of data that pours down from the sky growing ever more unmanageable, it seems that the old-style method of observation (in which astronomers, or kids on the lawn, point telescopes where they want to look) is gradually being replaced by something called data mining (in which researchers examine many layers of pre-recorded observations, frequently for the first time). With the Hubble Space Telescope alone downlinking more than two billion bytes a day, and with a higher-capacity next-generation space telescope being assembled in the wings, archives with the capacity to house hundreds of terabytes are necessary. When *Cassini* finally reaches Saturn, in 2004, its big high-gain antenna will start firehosing data down from the outer solar system at such a rate that the resulting flood will keep planetary scientists busy for generations. Despite unprecedented data-processing capabilities, they'll only be seining at the shores of the deep data ocean.

This outside-in, archival universe may be demanding all-new methodologies from the scientific classes, but it is also providing squinty-eyed tourists like me with more and more space to surf. With the Moon outside my frosted Ljubljana window now sliding well past its apex and descending toward the jagged Alps, I retrace the comet's tail of images produced by our distant robot explorers. The sheer number of these pictures, combined with the very high traveling speed of the cameras' platforms, creates a cinematic effect. This isn't a cathedral mosaic, arranged across a vaulted ceiling to make a composite narrative of heaven.

It's a flipbook—film stills strung out in sequence along intricate trajectories, culled from some of the most hyperkinetic dolly shots ever devised.

In the past five years the almost frighteningly beautiful trove of Jupiter images sent to Earth by the hit-and-run *Voyager* probes of the late seventies has been dwarfed by reams of downloads from *Galileo*—a cybernetic descendant of its namesake that is currently orbiting within the complex Jovian system.⁵ Europa, one of the four moons discovered by Galileo in 1610, is particularly stunning. Reminiscent of the sentient ocean planet in the Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Solaris* (but frozen into bizarre, intricate patterns of fault lines, and "chaos terrain"), this haunting sphere of frosted off-white is surfaced entirely by branching, splintering, glittering ice. Although cue-ball smooth when viewed from afar, up close it presents a fascinating array of elliptical fissures and ridges—an Abstract Expressionist surface that practically demands decipherment. In 1999 Gregory V. Hoppa, the late Randy Tufts, and a team of planetary scientists from the University of Arizona went a long way toward cracking the code, positing that the most mysterious fault lines identifiable on Europa—the wave-form-like "arcuate" fractures spiraling eerily across the crystalline landscapes near its poles—are almost certainly a result of Jupiter's shifting tidal pull on subsurface water.⁶

Only comparatively recently, in fact, have Europa's ramifications begun to register within the planetary-sciences community. The result is a cautious, gathering excitement: the moon has become one of the leading candidates as a host for extraterrestrial life. Some estimates hold that Europa contains five, even ten times as much water as Earth. Richard Terrile, of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, put it this way to the press: "How often is an ocean discovered? The last one was the Pacific, by Balboa, and that was five hundred years ago."

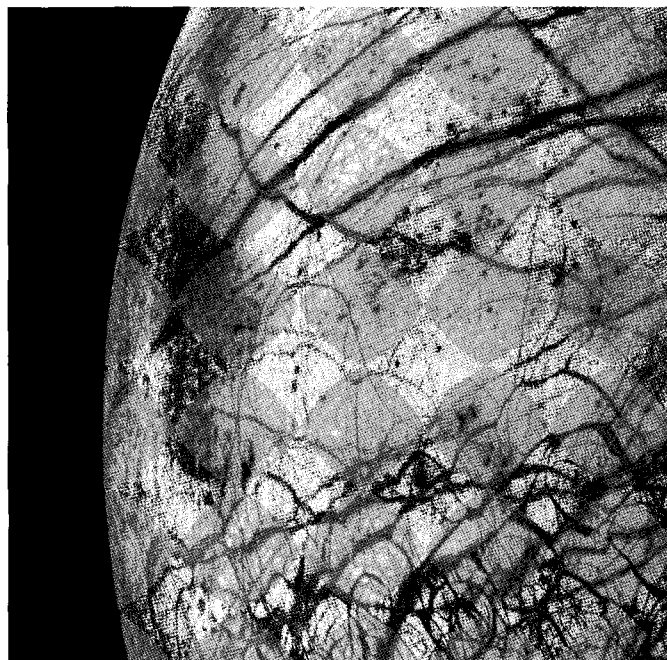
As I continue hoarding pictures, I reflect on the freakish diversity of the solar system. To take only one example: Europa floats directly outside the orbit of a sister moon named Io, which is the most volcanic object in known space. This extraordinary fire-and-ice pair couldn't be more different. Io is orange, purple, greenish in places, and irreducibly strange. Squeezed by the huge hand of Jupiter's gravity, it erupts with dozens of hyperactive volcanoes that continuously spew plumes hundreds of miles into space. The volcanoes' magma, which at its source can be far hotter than any on Earth, rains back down on a constantly changing outer crust. In an ongoing inside-out heave, Io is continually replacing its exterior with its interior.

Drifting now past Saturn's shimmering rings, I see that they're aswarm with dust and large boulders, and that they abound in spokelike features and strange kinks—the former perhaps caused by electrostatic charges in the dusty, weightless debris, the latter by the gravitational pull of two small "shepherd" moons. Entire schools of theory have arisen to try to explain these complex, ever-shifting phenomena. Following the image trail to the farthest periphery of the solar system, to Uranus and Neptune, the most-distant planets ever visited by a space probe, I catalogue bizarre sights along the way. There's Miranda, the smallest of Uranus's major moons. This 290-miles-in-diameter object, named after Prospero's daughter in *The Tempest*, has huge faults twelve miles deep. In one provisional theory scientists speculate that it may have been repeatedly shattered by unknown forces, and then just as inexplicably reassembled, throughout its obscure history. Bleakly lit by the distant sun, floating in the ether, it may as well be the place fervently requested by tempest-tossed Gonzalo: "Would I give a thousand furlongs of sea, for an acre of barren ground."

Arriving finally at deep-blue Neptune, the end of the line, I look down at the

⁵ See galileo.jpl.nasa.gov/

⁶ See pirlwww.lpl.arizona.edu/~hoppa/science.html

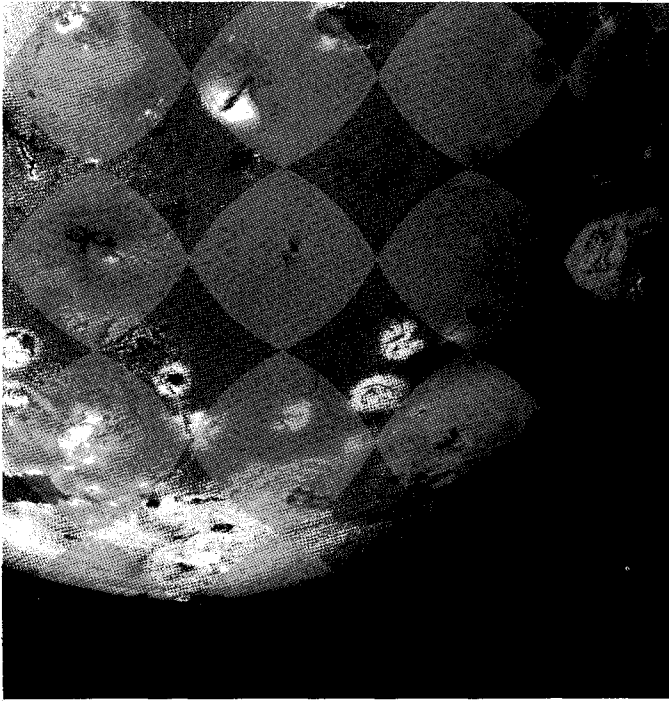


The fascinatingly intricate web of surface cracks and faults on Jupiter's moon Europa, which probably hide an immense global ocean. Europa is considered one of the leading candidates as a host for extraterrestrial life

sullen black storm that was its largest defining feature when *Voyager 2* whipped past the planet in 1989. Called the Great Dark Spot, it's a whirling bruise the size of Earth, and it whistles with the strongest winds yet measured on any planet. South of it, out of sync, an irregularly shaped white cloud—endearingly named Scooter by *Voyager* scientists—scuds frenetically along the planet's equator at 1,200 miles per hour.

As I pass through the chill vacuum beyond the Earth-surveyed solar system, I cast a glance back at crescent Neptune and see that it reminds me of a work of art—something created by a master toward the end of a long career. There's a wintry virtuosity at play, combined with a palpable absence of any need to show

off. Gone are the flashy excesses of Jupiter and Saturn. Neptune's rings are tenuous, almost invisible. Its haunting, cantaloupe-skinned moon Triton, one of the coldest places in known nature, is dark and inscrutable. Yet in spite of its deep-frozen state, activity is noticeable even here: plumes of carbon as black as squid ink emerge from cracks in its surface. Wafting upward, they're whipped suddenly into horizontal lines by some unseen hand. Below this startling scene, floating just above a blue vastness more unfathomable than any sea, a veil of wispy silver clouds is draped across Neptune's northern hemisphere.

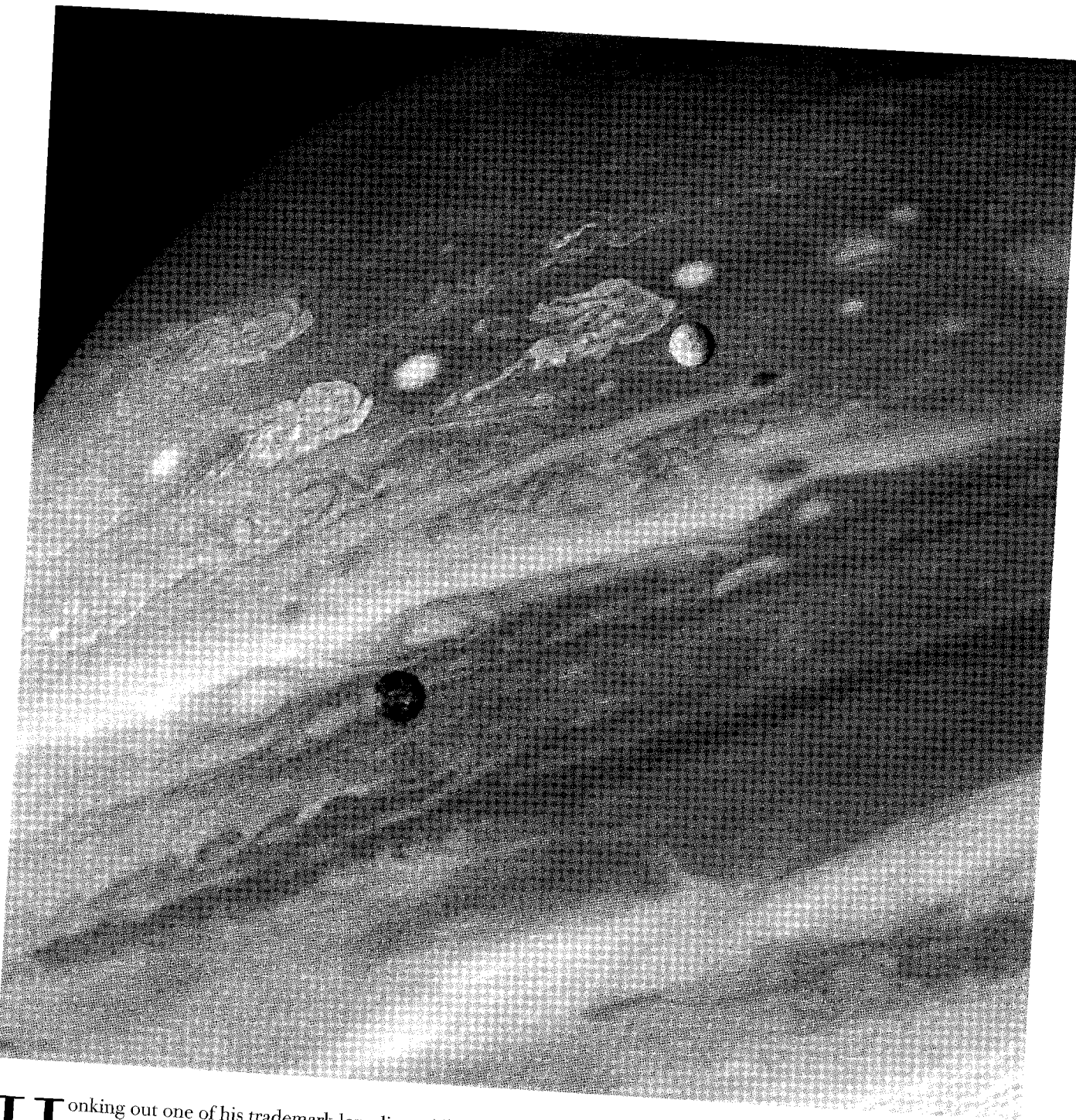


Insomniac nights. I move on to interstellar and intergalactic space—to places capable of making even the most exotic views of the planets and moons seem ... *local*. These images are sent down by the orbiting Hubble Space Telescope. Ever since its initial embarrassing myopia was cured by five intricately choreographed space walks during a shuttle mission in 1993, the Hubble has been transmitting an electrifying series of observations—images capable of shocking even the most space-weary astronomer (or visual artist, or theologian, for that matter) into an awed silence.

In early 1996 astronomers fortunate enough to have a time-share arrangement on the Hubble observed what is surely the most apocalyptic sight ever viewed by human beings: two galaxies colliding headlong. A few weeks later, on my screen, I saw them—the Antennae galaxies, so named because of the pair of long, luminous “antennae” of disrupted stellar matter that extends out from their explosive center.⁷ It was a scene of almost unimaginable, orgiastic violence—yet quite serenely beautiful at the same time. Salted through the heart of this collision are more than a thousand young star clusters. This is a cataclysm so immense and distant that the stark fact of our ability to capture it, let alone understand it, seems capable of redefining our picture of ourselves. Where do we stand in relation to this stellar train wreck? It isn't some dream beyond death. In fact, it pre-dates our birth as a species. And yet we miraculously came along to produce this perfect simulacrum, this freeze-frame of smashing stars, and to bind it in a computer hard drive.

The stardust we're made of was produced by vast explosions not unlike these. It was only much later that the double helix—that genetic concatenation of biochemical triggers, derricks, and hoists—arrived to work the material. Sometimes I wonder what it says about our civilization that most people haven't noticed, or taken the trouble to really look at, the amazing cornucopia our sensors have been sending down from the heavens. Could the same secular era that produced these visionary machines be responsible for muting some of the awe that should presumably greet what they reveal? In investing them with a measure of soul and curiosity, have we lost an equivalent amount in ourselves? Maybe we just need more time. Or maybe, to put it another way, we need more space.

⁷ See oposite.stsci.edu/pubinfo/pictures.html

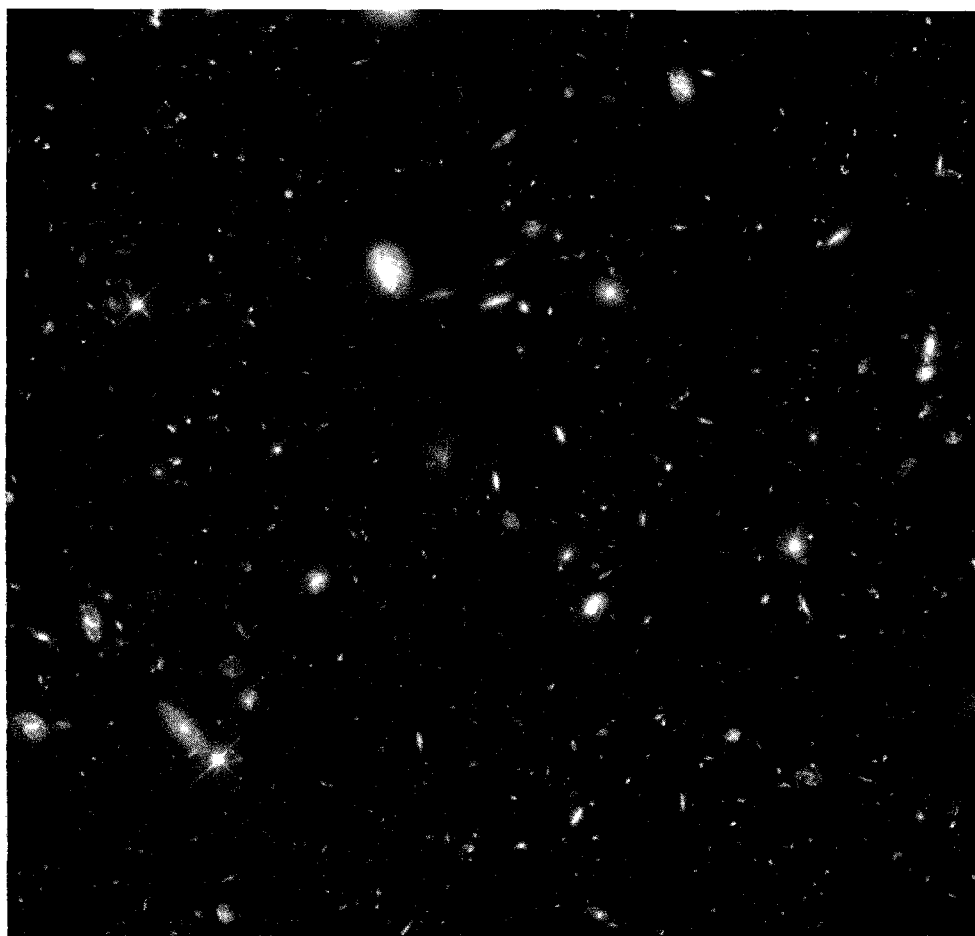


Honking out one of his trademark long lines, Allen Ginsberg put it well: the hipsters jittering through “Howl” burn for “the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night.” Less hip, but just as motivated, Hubble’s keepers tried an interesting experiment. From December 18 to 28, 1995, they focused on a place they assumed would have the *least* activity in it. Like a team of biologists bored with the ecstatic plenitude of life, like researchers dropping a blob of distilled water on a glass slide to see, finally, *something without anything*, they selected an area well above the cluttered plane of our galaxy and set the Hubble for the deepest focus possible. What they probed was an apparently empty quadrant in the vicinity of the Big Dipper’s handle. The sampled segment—the deepest image ever taken of the heavens—covered, according to the official press release, “a speck of the sky only about the width of a dime located 75 feet away.”

(Above) Two inner moons of Jupiter—volcanic Io on the left and frozen Europa on the right—are seen here, in a Voyager image, suspended over the planet’s perennially raging storms

(Opposite) Dramatically affected by Jupiter’s gravity, Io is the most volcanic object in known space and is constantly replacing its surface crust with material expelled from its molten interior

The faint beams of light from this tiny piece of space were painstakingly collected in 342 exposures over ten consecutive days. Cleaned up, processed, and digitally fused, these serial exposures finally came together to paint a picture not of an emptiness populated with a few feeble glowworm photons but of a spectral woven carpet of galaxies seemingly reaching on and out forever, deep into space and time. About 1,500 venerable pinwheels and other galactic forms careen through the Hubble's cosmic "core sample," so faint they're undetectable by even the largest ground-based telescopes. Some of them at magnitude 30 are still four billion times fainter than that which can be seen by the unaided human eye. Called the Hubble Deep Field, the image gives vertiginous new meaning to the term "recorded history."



The Hubble Deep Field, a cosmic core sample reaching back to the earliest galaxies ever seen, represents the deepest look into space and time ever recorded

Selecting the highest-resolution file of this picture I can find, a sixty-seven-megabyte giant archived somewhere in England, I hit "load" and walk away from the apartment for four hours. Ljubljana on a winter's night: kamikaze drivers barrel through a dense, rolling fog. I look up at the sky; there's nothing there. Back in my apartment a laptop methodically assembles the galaxies.

When I finally return, through scrambled medieval streets and up creaking stairs, a vision from the edge of known reality fills my screen. Scrolling up and across, I try to understand. *No*, I finally decide, *I'm not deceiving myself. This product of science is every bit as profound in its implications as the opening sentences of the Old Testament.*

A while ago I sent a draft of this article to a friend in New York, the writer Lawrence Weschler (see "The Jewel of Poland," in this issue). He fired back a passage from Carl Sagan.

In some respects, science has far surpassed religion in delivering awe. How is it that hardly any major religion has looked at science and concluded, "This is better than we thought! The universe is much bigger than our prophets said—grander, more subtle, more elegant. God must be even greater than we dreamed"? Instead they say, "No, no, no! My god is a little god, and I want him to stay that way." A religion, old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths. Sooner or later, such a religion will emerge.

In the first known writing, Sumerian cuneiform, God was depicted as a star. Text and image, in other words, were once one. Five thousand years later the Hubble, a product of "pure" secular science, brings us full circle. It does so by looking far beyond any human language, spoken or written. About 10 billion years before the Sumerians the most distant—and therefore the oldest—galaxies visible in the Deep Field were still in the process of forming. They were doing so (in the picture they *are still* doing so, because the reddish light fired outward during their birth took that long to get here) "perhaps less than one billion

NASA/STSCI

years after the universe's birth in the Big Bang," according to the Space Telescope Science Institute.

Since that winter seven years ago, when the Deep Field image was assembled, space-telescope astronomers have concluded that no matter what seemingly vacant speck of space they deep-focus their cameras on, they'll inevitably find such an abundance of ancient, glinting fires. Trolling through these multicolored galaxies (the Deep Field image is so large that my screen can only sample a portion of it at a time), I shake my head. Clearly, science is producing iconographic images fraught with a kind of religious intensity. It does so by lengthening the border between what's visible (and therefore, at least provisionally, interpretable) and the ineffable beyond. This *beyond* deserves the term simply by definition. And as with any religious icon, or any work of visual art, the galaxies stacked up in the Hubble Deep Field are discernible in the first place because behind them is—darkness. Something undefined. A place—or, rather, an absence of place—that astronomers have named the Dark Zone.

This absolute darkness exists on the other side of the Big Bang. It pullulates its inscrutable energies before the Word. The ultimate *nada*, it provides a deep black backing canvas for the Beginning. In the presence of this supreme mystery, science, religion, and art all fuse into an etiological question without an answer. The English title for the first book of the Old Testament derives from *Genesis kosmou*, Greek for "origin of the cosmos." But the black backdrop beyond these earliest visible galaxies is a text we'll never be able to find the meaning of, written in an ink that has spread well beyond the margins of the page.

Suddenly I realize that I'm leaning forward, as if I were riding a motorcycle at a dangerously high rate of speed. My nose is only inches from the screen: if I hit a bump, I could vault right through—ending up in the distant past. Or am I already there, looking even further back? And how do you measure the nothing in nothing? How do you place *something without anything* in time and space when it's beyond both? A tension is set up—a vibration, as we almost grasp the ungraspable, and even have the hubris to put a frame around it. The ineffable presence of this absence calls to mind an observation by Novalis: "Philosophy is really homesickness, an urge to be at home everywhere. Where, then, are we going? Always to our home."

In the end, the Hubble's keepers found their emptiness in spades—their emptiness distilled. Above our heads the light cast off by all those impossibly distant galaxies continues to stream past. The fall of a goose feather is like a redwood crashing to earth by comparison.

As I log off, disengaging from that infinitely extended yet exquisitely detailed *out there*, it occurs to me that the sending of commands through cyberspace to unlock the images stored in these deep-space archives is a perfect analogue to the transmission and reception of data to and from our distant probes. The living, updated sites devoted to these cybernetic explorers are the link between inner and outer space, between the complex, growing, ever-changing web at the center of our knowledge banks and its most far-flung filaments. Together this whole elaborate structure begins to constitute something like the entirety of the information sphere. It becomes, as Novalis said, home.

With a few flicks of the finger, for example, I can determine that *Voyager 1*, the most distant artifact ever made by humanity, reset its "command loss timer" the other day. I can tell you how much propellant it has left, and the power levels of its generators. *Voyager left the solar system more than a decade ago. It is nearly eight billion miles away.* The spacecraft's EKG readings are so weak that the signal striking NASA's global network of deep-space antennas is only 10^{-16} watts—or one part in 10 quadrillion. A digital watch uses 20 billion times more power.

**"Anyone who believes
cannot experience
miracles. By day one
does not see any stars."**

—FRANZ KAFKA

**“In some respects,
science has far
surpassed religion
in delivering awe.
How is it that hardly
any major religion
has looked at science
and concluded,
‘This is better than
we thought!’”**

—CARL SAGAN

Traveling at the speed of light, a signal from *Voyager* currently takes more than ten hours to reach Earth.

Later I will edit images, crop them, print them out. Coffee. Morning sunlight bounces off the snow. A Yugo buzzes by below the window like a fly. I see that were they created by individual human beings, some of these pictures of the solar system and the stars would be considered as much works of art as, for example, Ansel Adams's celebrated photographs of Yosemite, or Frederic Church's paintings of Niagara. But these depictions of nature are far wilder. I survey an intricate, storm-racked black-and-white *Galileo* mosaic—five joined pictures of Jupiter's immense hydrogen-cloud belts, stacked jaggedly in a kind of composite lightning bolt. It's a picture worthy of a planet named after the Roman ruler of the universe. It also brings to mind Leonardo's monochromatic *Adoration of the Magi*, never completed, which dominates a room in the Uffizi Gallery, in Florence. The three Wise Men gaze in amazement at the impossible child. Seated at the center, a serene anchor to the composition, the Madonna smiles enigmatically. Around them an inexplicable cosmos swirls: concentric whorls leading, finally, to a set of stairs reaching up and out—to the heavens.

In the apocalyptic gloom of Tarkovsky's last film, *The Sacrifice*, two characters peer anxiously at a framed reproduction of this same painting. Calling it “sinister,” one of them confesses, “I've always been terrified of Leonardo.” Seeking a reproduction of *Adoration*, I click my CD-ROM encyclopedia open to “Leonardo,” and find this sentence: “His scientific theories, like his artistic innovations, were based on careful observation and precise documentation. He understood, better than anyone of his century or the next, the importance of precise scientific observation.”

Ninety years after Leonardo's death Galileo turned his telescope to the sky—and our knowledge of the universe exploded. By the end of the seventeenth century the total number of known bodies in the solar system had more than doubled. Three hundred years later, near the end of its own life, Galileo's robot namesake continues to thread its way among the moons he discovered. The universe is exploding again.

I burn *Galileo*'s depiction of Jupiter onto a CD—a procedure necessary because the file is so large—and take it to a place full of shiny new machines busy printing, with the methodical longitudinal whirl of high-speed ink jets, big photo-quality images, mostly for advertising. The guy flicking switches there is so intrigued by this raging Jovian stormscape—not to mention my oddball reasons for wanting a poster-size copy of it—that he prints the picture out on a panel the size of a door and refuses to take money. Motoring back on Ljubljana's perilous ring road, I meditate on the fact that questions of authorship would tend to disqualify a space probe's pictures from serious consideration as works of art—even though its scientific discoveries are undeniable, and attributed. Yet those same questions are very much present in the rarefied art-world air these days. Even Ansel Adams was Ansel Adams only part of the time. Like most photographers, he shot a lot of pictures and then selected those few that today constitute the work we connect with his name. As for these deep-space images, they aren't really very different. It's just that they come from the confluence of an immense collective scientific and engineering effort and the stark, disturbing beauty of the cosmos itself. What's left is choice—curatorship.

And I would argue that these pictures qualify as art for another reason: their mysterious, Leonardo-esque smile. Who can fathom the mind-blowing idea that, just possibly, some rich, strange form of life may be swimming around under the frozen crust of Europa—a sphere itself in orbit around wrathful Jupiter? And what other way currently exists to leave Earth and look back at that glistening blue-white marble suspended in darkness, a diminishing place, a mote finally winking down to microscopic size and being replaced by a larger system of

NASA/STSC



turning worlds? In this cosmic tracking shot it's not only space and time that are spanned but also the sum total of our homegrown sciences, philosophies, and arts, revealing, ultimately, a shower of sparks—the universe.

The jagged geometry of supersmooth Europa; the idiosyncratic surfaces of the other orbs floating serenely in space; the pristine interstellar vacuum; the inscrutable emptiness of *intergalactic* space, that immense, echoing, absolutely featureless void enveloping the spinning galaxies: it all serves as a perfect philosophical mirror image, reflecting back the quandary of the species, the limitations of human knowledge. The frail architecture defined by our distant tools, which places the human race at the center of “what’s known,” is actually our own map of ourselves—a chart that we’ll hand down to successive generations, who may one day see a charming primitivism, or even an intriguing prescience, in our view of *all that*.

I park the car, tread through snowdrifts, and climb the complaining stairs. *Galileo’s* rendition of Jupiter hangs above my desk in a beam of winter sunlight so feeble that it might be coming from some more distant star. Is this science, religion, or art? Or some kind of recombinant, millennial all-of-the-above? Maybe Leonardo’s Madonna, poised superbly in front of the eroding topography of our particular sphere, is smiling because she knows the answers to those questions. Finally, though, what she might say is irrelevant. Because that ambiguity continues in the infinite landscapes beyond—up the staircase of an incomplete *Adoration*. ▀

Michael Benson is the director of the award-winning film Predictions of Fire (1995) and is in post-production on two other films, More Places Forever and Zero. He is at work on a book, Beyond: The Art of the Space Probes, which will feature some of the pictures appearing in this issue.

Previously unseen details of mysterious, complex structures within the Carina Nebula, captured by the Hubble Space Telescope in 1999

A NOTORIOUS TRIFLER

*For Ogden Nash, humor was “a shield, a weapon, a survival kit.”
Herewith a small selection, previously unpublished*

BY GARY COHEN

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This August marks the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Ogden Nash, the idiosyncratic American master of light verse who is perhaps best remembered for his Prohibition-era suggestion that in matters of social ice-breaking, “Candy/Is dandy/But liquor/Is quicker.” For decades most of Nash’s papers, public and private, have been in the possession of the University of Texas (Nash sold them, in 1967, to pay an unexpectedly large IRS bill), but more documents have recently come to light. Discovered among old family papers by Frances Smith, one of Nash’s granddaughters, they include letters, poems, notes on rhyming possibilities, line drawings, drafts of stories, and rejected verse. A few selections are published here, for the first time.

Although Nash wrote prolifically for more than four decades, from the late 1920s through the 1960s, he always took pains to distance himself from any sort of earnest literary ambition. In his youth he decided to work at becoming “a good bad poet” rather than “a bad good poet”; later in life he defined himself not as a poet but as a “versifier” and devoted himself to “the minor idiocies of humanity”; and in 1970, only a year before his death, he dismissed himself as “a notorious trifler” and “a freak with the knack for rhyming.”

Although some critics agreed with that last assessment, Nash had friends and fellow writers who were less deprecating. In 1938 F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote, in a letter to his daughter, “Ogden Nash’s poems are not careless, they all have an extraordinary inner rhythm.” The literary critic Clifton Fadiman was a great admirer too. “I once nominated Mr. Nash for the Pulitzer Prize,” Fadiman recalled, not long after Nash’s death, “but the judges weren’t listening. I not only thought Mr. Nash the best writer of light verse of his time, but sort of a poet laureate of our age of small frictions. He writes, in a suitably bumpy manner, about these troubles we all share, such as the common cold and Monday mornings.” The poet Archibald MacLeish was perhaps Nash’s most enthusiastic booster, going so far as to credit Nash—in the preface to *I Wouldn’t Have Missed It* (1975), a posthumous collection of Nash’s verse—with “the invention of

a form, uniquely his own, which defied all the categories.”

Artist or trifler, Nash was for years a popular and commercially successful writer. His first book of verse, *Hard Lines*, published in 1931, went through seven printings in a single year. Emboldened by his success, Nash quit his job as an editor at Doubleday (where he was the first to publish a book by the future U.S. poet laureate Stanley Kunitz), worked briefly for *The New Yorker*, and went on ultimately to publish about fifty more books of verse. He was also regularly pulled in other directions, many of them improbable. In the mid-1930s he moved to Hollywood and worked on, among other things, a movie adaptation of Dale Carnegie’s best-selling *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and a rewrite of *The Wizard of Oz*. (Neither was ever used.) In 1942–1943 Nash wrote the lyrics and co-wrote the libretto (with S. J. Perelman) for the successful Broadway musical *One Touch of Venus*, which featured a score by Kurt Weill—and in 1943, the new Nash papers confirm, he even attempted a stage-musical adaptation of *Gone With the Wind*.

In the 1950s and 1960s Nash’s popularity as a writer waned, and he spent more and more time on the lecture circuit. One of the last speeches he delivered, in 1970, was a commencement address to his granddaughter Linell’s graduating class at Miss Porter’s School, in Connecticut. In the address, a copy of which was found in the Smith papers, Nash summed up the effect he strove for in his work. He wanted to inspire laughter, not laughs, he said. Humor “is not brash,” he wrote. “It is not cheap. It is not heartless. Among other things, it is a shield, a weapon, a survival kit.” He continued, “So here we are, several million of us, crowded into our global concentration camp for the duration. How are we to survive? Solemnity is not the answer, any more than witless and irresponsible frivolousness. I think our best chance—a good chance—lies in humor, which, in this case, means a wry acceptance of our predicament.” ▀

Gary Cohen is a freelance writer based in Washington, D.C. His article “The Keystone Kommandos,” about a failed Nazi mission to sabotage U.S. industry, appeared in the February Atlantic.

PHYMES + SOUNDS

Picayune - Picaroon

Burgoo - (obscure) - Shunquellion (Bungee)

Grumion - Judson

Pistachio pastiche

Carabou Calabosse - hoosegow Moosegow

Manatee - Manitou

Methuselah - Lallahpaloozala

Fishwives housewives alewives mousewives

I know just as much about life before birth and
after death as Confucius, St. Paul or Billy Graham

Ganymede - Rummy mode

Meyerheer - Biedeneyer

Icarus - licorice

Venguetrix - obstetrics

Dodo - Dido

Paul Manchip - On-up-manship - F-trall-manship

Perimeter - scimitar

Bandelier - Chandelier

Flourished - Gin discouraged

ENNUI - Can we?

Good riddance - Co-in-cid-ence

DEEMSTER - teamster - Sempstness etc

Edwardian - guardian

Sophisticate - fish'cubbs

DMITRI GUITRY

Reliable - viable

Alagash - Allepheng - alligator - allegory - allegation

Thurable - indurable

Anatomy - anathema

Cathedrals mosques basilicas - Gee Whillikens

Monologue, dialogue, Bandas log

Cryptic - triptych

TWO POEMS *by Ogden Nash*

.....

UNTITLED

I envy oft my faithful pup.
He has no trouble getting up.
While just to rouse my Cousin Eric
Takes three bull dozers and a derrick.

I envy, too, the woolly sheep.
It has no trouble going to sleep,
But if to go to sleep it chooses,
While wakeful people count it, it snoozes.

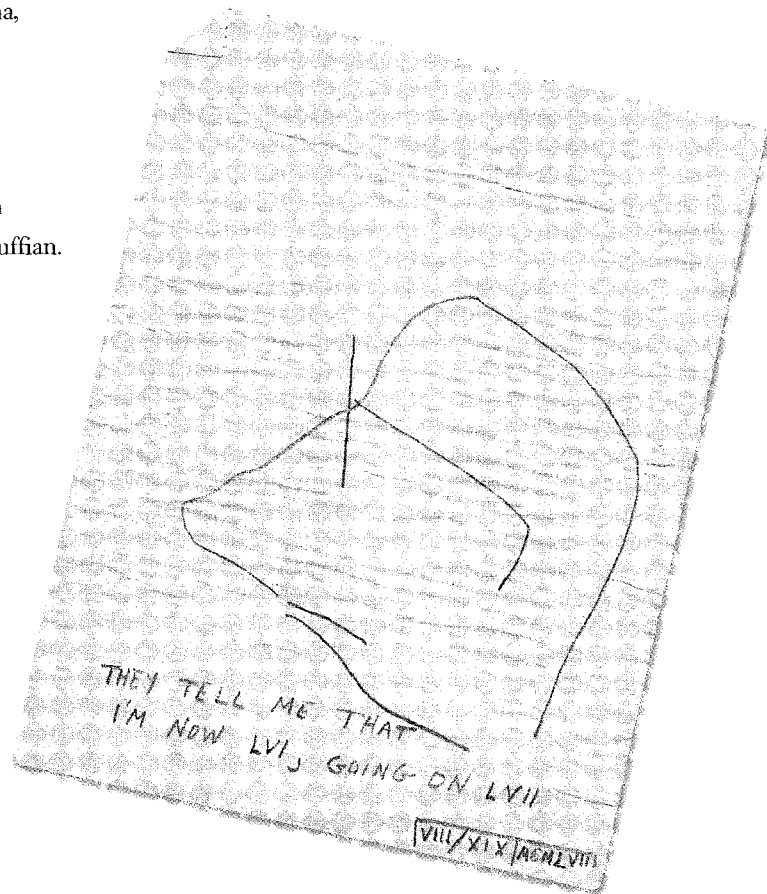
Sometimes to be a fish I crave.
They hardly ever have to shave.
Each morning when I eye my chin, Oh
How I wish I was a minnow.

And here's another pleasing thing—
I've never known a fish to sing;
Except for one who drank Peruna,
And was, I think, a piano tuna.

The snake is naturally slim
So calories do not bother him.
If I were like that slender ruffian
I could eat a second buttered muffin.

TO A FOOLISH DOG

Joxer, bouncing harlequin,
All ingratiating grin,
Which begat thee, jolly Joxer?
Airedale, poodle, beagle, boxer?
Scottie braw or Irish terrier?
Never mind, the more the merrier;
A pedigree so heterodox
Perks up thy personality, Jox,
For thou, rambunctuous residual,
Wert whelped unique and individual,
A blithe buffoon, a jester pampered,
Nor by the *Ten* commandments hampered,
(I know thou triflest with the Seventh)
But Joxer, mind the stern Eleventh,
Or learn from choking leash and baffling tether
Thy neighbor's leghorns thou shalt not de-feather.



DESIGNER BUGS

Four years ago a team of Australian scientists, attempting to create a genetically engineered virus to combat common pests, stumbled across a mechanism that could potentially increase the killing power of a host of human diseases. Their findings, published last year amid great controversy, bring to the fore a question of increasing urgency: Might technologies intended to improve the world provide terrorists and rogue nations with the means to build the ultimate bio-weapon?

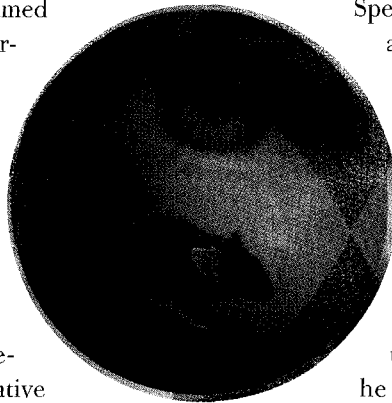
BY JON COHEN

Illustrations by Marc Yankus

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In 1859 a wealthy Australian grazier named Thomas Austin imported for sport thirteen wild English rabbits to his estate near Geelong, in Victoria. The rabbits did what rabbits do, and within three years 14,253 of them had been shot on Austin's land. By 1869 more than two million had been killed on a neighbor's property. Soon hundreds of millions of rabbits formed what became known as a "gray blanket" across the continent, destroying native plants, competing with native animals for food and shelter, and savaging grazing lands. In 1950 the government agreed to wage bio-warfare against them, and scientists released myxomatosis, a rabbit-specific pox virus from South America, into the wild. The virus quickly killed 99 percent of the country's rabbits. During the next three years, however, the kill rate among the initial survivors and their descendants dropped to 95 percent; it continued to decline until, eventually, it leveled off at about 50 percent. "It was a classic example of the co-evolution of virus and host," Frank Fenner told me recently. Fenner, a virologist at the John Curtin School of Medical Research, in Canberra, headed the studies analyzing why myxomatosis became less effective. In essence, he said, "you've got this arms race" in which the virus becomes weaker and the rabbit more resistant.

In 1988 a young virologist named Ron Jackson began working at what would later be called the Pest Animal Control division of the Cooperative Research Centre, in Canberra. His goal was to devise a solution that would sidestep those evolutionary forces and work indefinitely.



Specifically, he hoped to produce a genetically altered virus that would sterilize rabbits. Jackson initially planned to use myxomatosis, but he couldn't easily get the rabbit genes he needed to engineer the virus. So he switched to mice and a virus called mousepox, intending to perform a "proof-of-concept" experiment that would allow him subsequently to proceed with rabbits. When the project showed early signs of success, he realized that the strategy might also be applied to mice, which bedevil Australia almost as much as rabbits do.

Every four years or so Australian mouse populations explode, causing what is referred to as a plague of mice. Each mouse plague costs the grain industry roughly \$75 million in lost production. "So we view it very much that we're working on industry's behalf," Tony Peacock, the head of the Pest Animal Control division (essentially, Australia's Minister of Pests), told me recently. Mouse plagues also affect the general population, causing annoyances large and small; for example, mice are expert at chewing through electrical wires in people's homes.

And then there are rats, which cause widespread damage in Australia and destroy up to 20 percent of the world's rice crop—\$4.5 billion worth—each year, and which carry some sixty viruses that can infect human beings. Research into contraceptives for rabbits and mice might ultimately have the added benefit of pointing to an effective strategy for controlling rats. Back in 1988 there seemed no reason not to pursue it.

"WHAT HAVE WE CREATED HERE?"

Ten years later, on January 27, 1998, Ron Jackson's day began, like many of his days, with a drive along the winding roads of the Australian National University campus in Canberra. Eventually Jackson pulled up in front of the brick buildings of the John Curtin School, located across town from his own lab at the Cooperative Research Centre. The school is one of the few places in the world where researchers can work with mousepox. Although it is closely related to variola, the virus that causes smallpox in human beings, mousepox cannot harm people. It can, however, wipe out entire colonies of mice. An accidental release of mousepox among laboratory mice could ruin months' or even years' worth of experiments, so the school takes many precautions to ensure that the mousepox used there stays there.

Jackson came first to the outer door of the animal lab. Next to it a sign warns, in block red letters, NO ADMITTANCE. HIGHLY INFECTIOUS AREA. After swiping his key card, he walked down the hall and entered the "clean room," a small vestibule lined with bright-green surgical gowns. He donned a gown and snapped on a pair of powder-blue polypropylene shoe covers. He then opened the door to the "dirty room," a facility with negative pressure to prevent air from escaping. Inside the dirty room, amid the odors of mouse food and urine, he padded over to two metal cages, each of which held five mice of the strain known in lab shorthand as Black 6.

Jackson and his fellow researchers, who included Ian Ramshaw, an immunologist at the Curtin School, were working with a genetically engineered mousepox that should have caused no serious harm to Black 6, which can survive even the most lethal known strain of the virus. Ideally, female mice infected with Jackson and Ramshaw's virus would become sterile and would also infect other females, sterilizing them as well. The virus would work like a vaccine, preventing pregnancy much as a vaccine prevents illness.

Mice, like human beings, coat their eggs in a jelly composed of several proteins. The jelly helps sperm to implant and protects the fertilized egg as it makes its way through the fallopian tube. Female mice normally do not mount an immune response to their own eggs; but Jackson and Ramshaw reasoned that if female mice became flooded with high doses of an egg-jelly protein, the mice's immune systems would "break tolerance" for the protein: the protein would, in effect, look like foreign material, triggering an antibody attack against the eggs. Because the protein is neither infectious nor transmissible, it would have to be carried by another agent—a sort of Trojan horse. Genetically engineered mousepox would serve as the Trojan horse.

Earlier that month Jackson and Ramshaw had published a paper suggesting that their virus could work: in one strain of mice it had sterilized 70 percent of the females they had tried it on. There was a big catch, however: it failed to work

in two other mouse strains. To reduce mouse populations significantly, a sterilizing vaccine would, of course, have to work in many strains. The researchers decided to tackle the problem head on, refocusing their efforts on the most recalcitrant of the other two strains—Black 6.

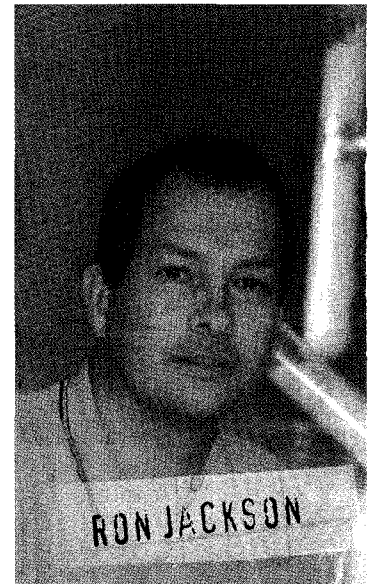
Jackson and Ramshaw theorized that the immune system in Black 6 was so effective against mousepox that it was destroying the Trojan horse before it could breach cellular walls and deliver the protein. They decided, therefore, to tweak the immune system in two ways, simultaneously boosting its attack on the protein and blunting its attack on the mousepox. The researchers were encouraged to pursue such seemingly contradictory aims by the fact that the immune system has a seesaw-like mechanism. On one end of the seesaw are Y-shaped antibodies, which latch onto proteins and render them inert. On the other end are so-called killer cells, which target and destroy cells infected by foreign invaders. Tilting the seesaw toward a greater antibody response should, theoretically, push it away from producing killer cells, allowing more mousepox to survive long enough to deliver the protein.

In an effort to tilt the seesaw in this way, Jackson and Ramshaw inserted a gene for interleukin-4 into their mousepox. IL-4 is a chemical, secreted by the immune system, that boosts the production of antibodies in both mice and human beings. On January 21 the team injected ten Black 6 mice with the new version of

mousepox. Six days later, when Jackson checked on the mice, he found that the IL-4 had had a vastly different effect from what he'd expected. One mouse was dead, its tissues badly swollen—a classic symptom of mousepox. Several others were hunched up and quiet. Two days later three more mice died; by the end of the month all ten were dead.

Jackson and his colleagues immediately realized the implications with respect to smallpox and its potential as a biological weapon. "We'd come up with, at least with mousepox, a highly effective mechanism for increasing lethality of a virus for genetically resistant animals," he explains. In short, they had stumbled on what might prove a relatively simple way to bolster the killing power of smallpox, already one of the most feared viruses of all time.

Soon the researchers would have data that were even more alarming. The mice, they realized, had died because the IL-4 had undermined their production of killer cells too well, leaving the animals vulnerable to a disease they



were normally able to resist. What would happen, they wondered, if they vaccinated Black 6 mice against mousepox before injecting them with the IL-4 version of the sterilizing virus?

By November, Jackson had the results: even in vaccinated mice the mousepox with IL-4 was lethal 60 percent of the time. He immediately went upstairs to Ramshaw's office to convey the news. "Oh, boy," Ramshaw said. "What have we created here?"

Again, the implications regarding smallpox were inescapable. The vaccine against smallpox was so effective that the World Health Organization eradicated variola from the human population more than two decades ago, and routine vaccinations were halted. All stockpiles of the virus were destroyed, save for two: one in a laboratory in Atlanta, Georgia, the other in a lab in Koltsovo, Russia. Mass vaccination would be our most effective defense should terrorists (or "rogue nations") obtain smallpox and use it as a

weapon. But a version of variola containing IL-4 might render that defense useless.

hundreds; panic sweeping the populace, with some people blocking access to their communities and others taking to the backwoods with food and weapons in an effort to escape. Moreover, the media's handling of the story would muddy a vital discussion about how to gauge the threats posed by natural and engineered bio-weapons and how to determine what steps scientists, policymakers, and the public should take.

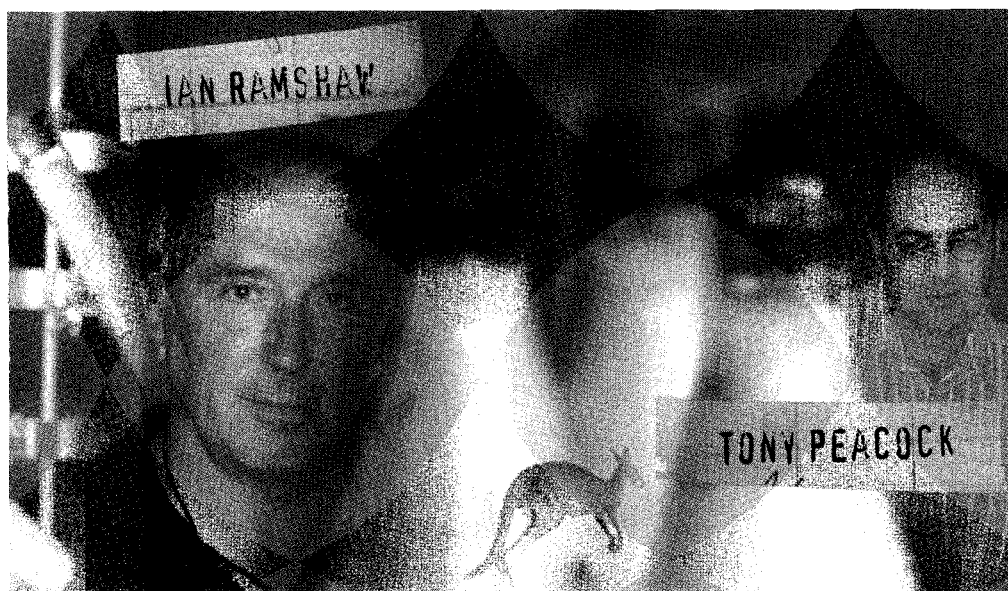
THE PERILS OF PLAYING OSTRICH

The mousepox-IL-4 results surfaced at a time when the public had an unusually hearty appetite for such information. The late 1990s had brought startling revelations about bio-weapons programs in the former Soviet Union and Iraq, along with rising concerns about emerging viruses such as Ebola and West Nile. Some scientists had begun to discuss the potential of genetic engineering to create bugs that could cause mayhem. Steven Block, a biophysicist at Stanford University, quickly established himself as a leading oracle of doom, albeit one with a carefully reasoned argument based on cutting-edge science.

To Block, the mousepox-IL-4 data represented a vindication of sorts. "I was enormously relieved that someone did this," Block told me when I visited him in his lab last winter. "We needed at least one example like this to galvanize our thinking and our actions. I believe on balance they've done us a service."

Block came to bio-weapons through JASON, an elite, semi-secretive group of nearly fifty primarily academic scientists who provide independent advice about national-security issues to the U.S. government. (The group is named after the figure in Greek mythology who set out with the Argonauts to fetch the golden fleece.) In 1997 Block led a JASON study of the threats posed by recent advances in molecular biology. The results, published in a collection of essays called *The New Terror* (1999), in a chapter titled "Living Nightmares," constitute a chilling overview of the ways in which new technologies might allow the creation of "designer bugs" that would be everything a terrorist could hope for: safer than conventional bugs to handle, easier to distribute, more contagious, deadlier, and better at dodging existing drugs and vaccines.

Cradling a cappuccino (brewed on his lab's \$5,000 Italian espresso maker) as we spoke, Block mixed rapid-fire discussion of "stealth viruses," "binary weapons," and "gene



weapon. But a version of variola containing IL-4 might render that defense useless.

Jackson and Ramshaw knew that the bio-weapon they had created to combat common pests—a weapon whose mechanism might be used to intensify a host of human diseases, not just smallpox—fundamentally altered the world's terror equation, much as suicide hijackers did again three years later. What they did not know was how to handle their findings, or even whether to publish them at all—a quandary that molecular biologists will increasingly face. Their uncertainty would be borne out: when they did publish their results, in February of last year, they found themselves at the center of a media storm that distorted many of the details and implications of their work. People would soon begin imagining the worst: terrorists unleashing a virulent disease and public-health officials mounting enormous vaccination campaigns, only to see those vaccinated rapidly succumb; health-care workers dying by the

shuffling” with references to a fictional “Q” bomb (from *The Mouse That Roared*) and H. G. Wells’s warnings in *The Outline of History* (human beings more and more often find themselves in “a race between education and catastrophe”). A clock with a photo of Albert Einstein on its face hung on the wall, and a row of trophies that Block won in banjo-playing competitions adorned one shelf. “There have been a lot of criticisms of the JASON report that said, ‘Block, this is all good and well, but that stuff is so far out there, it’s so futuristic, it’s so weird, we shouldn’t devote any of our time to this sort of fictional nonsense—let’s worry about the real world here,’” Block told me. The mousepox experiment, he emphasized, shows that the threat of designer bio-weapons must now be considered part of the real world.

In “Living Nightmares,” a document studded with exclamation marks, Block highlighted the “lamentable ease” with which modern bio-science can manipulate genes to create weapons of mass destruction—or, more likely, mass disruption, as the anthrax attacks last fall suggest. Unlike nuclear weapons, which require scarce and expensive materials, most genetically engineered bio-weapons can be made from raw materials that are found in abundance (smallpox is an exception). And there is no shortage of biologists with the ability to manipulate bugs; such manipulation usually requires relatively inexpensive machinery and relies on well-documented techniques. Indeed, in military circles bio-weapons are sometimes referred to as “the poor man’s nukes.”

However, Block also stresses the paradox that underpins every discussion of bio-weapons: the same technologies that could destroy civilization could also build a healthier world. “Merely because a technology has a dual use is not a reason to stop it,” he told me. “Information is information. It doesn’t have a white hat or a black hat. It’s neither good nor bad. It just is.”

“Living Nightmares” compiled a long list of horrors that twenty-first-century “black biology” could conceivably create. For example, as scientists sequence the complete genomes of ever more pathogens, it will become easier to manufacture viruses that combine, say, a common strain of flu with the nastiest genes from a rare strain—or to create mixtures of two entirely different bugs. Bio-terrorists could equip a relatively harmless vector (for example, adenovirus, a common respiratory virus) to deliver a payload of deadly genes—ones that could, for example, prevent blood from clotting. They could concoct a genetically engineered stealth virus—one that, like many naturally occurring viruses, including herpes simplex, would infect a person but remain harmless unless triggered by a specific stimulus. (Herpes simplex is triggered by sunlight or stress.) Scientists might engineer pathogens that would direct the body’s immune-system cells to commit mass suicide, or would cause pancreatic cells suddenly to secrete enormous amounts of insulin. To circumvent the dangers of handling such deadly bugs, they could make binary weapons: for instance, they could remove the portion of DNA that

makes a particular strain of *E. coli* dangerous, and could safely manufacture large amounts of the neutered *E. coli* and also of the DNA fragment. A terrorist could recombine the two at the moment of attack.

“Living Nightmares” acknowledged that this “exercise in imagination” has led to some “rather fanciful” ideas. Still, in view of accounts from scientists who participated in the former Soviet Union’s clandestine bio-weapons program, it has to be seen as more than just a dark parlor game. In his book *Biohazard* (1999), Ken Alibek, a former top official in the Soviet program, described how a decade earlier he attended a conference near Moscow during which molecular biologists reported success in creating a bubonic-plague bacterium that included a gene for the nerve-damaging myelin toxin; an anthrax strain impervious to five antibiotics; and a drug-resistant form of glanders, a horse bacterium that can infect and kill human beings. “You read Alibek’s book and wonder how much of it is fish story and how much of it is real,” Block says. “But of course even if only ten percent of it is real, there’s a great deal to be concerned about.”

Research conducted more openly, with benign aims, has also underscored the need for concern. For example, in 1998, at the Imperial College in London, investigators manufactured a hepatitis C virus that contained genes from the dengue-fever virus. They hoped that the dengue would provide critical factors that would allow them to grow hepatitis C in laboratory cultures; the inability to grow unadulterated hepatitis C has hampered vaccine and drug development for many years. Intense public criticism of the hybrid arose after government inspectors made an unannounced visit to the lab and found several health and safety violations. (Last July the college agreed to pay fines and costs of \$65,000 but stressed that “no member of the public was at risk at any time.”) A news article that appeared in *Science* in August linked the experiment to the Australian work on mousepox, quoting a bio-weapons expert who said, “No matter how cautious you are, you get situations where you create something of a far higher risk than predicted.”

Block says that some of his colleagues play ostrich with respect to such issues, for fear that addressing them will provide fodder for the growing opposition to biotechnology and will lead to new restrictions on their work. Other biologists contend that open discussion risks supplying terrorists with blueprints for mayhem.

To Block, these arguments are naive or worse. Not only do they exaggerate the dangers of openly discussing the issues but they downplay a danger we might be able to address: the realpolitik that could make bio-terrorism attractive to terrorists or certain nations. “In the past it was argued that no one would want to release a contagious disease that killed a third of all the individuals on the planet,” Block says. “You’d be shooting yourself in the foot. But a country like Afghanistan loses a third of its population, and after mourning the loss of so many individuals, the country

goes on pretty much as it did. An agrarian nation remains an agrarian nation. A developed country has farther to fall. Society as we know it would come to a grinding halt if we suffered such a significant loss of population. Therefore the release of an incredibly lethal contagious disease would perversely level the playing field. And in this new world order some of the undeveloped countries might have a better crack at the big time than they do under the current status." We need to confront such scenarios squarely, Block argues, rather than bury our heads in the sand.

THE MEDIA STORM

On a bookshelf in Frank Fenner's office at the John Curtin School stands a file box labeled "Smallpox post 1980"—the year that the World Health Organization declared its eradication campaign a success. Fenner recently added another word to the label: "bio-terrorism."

On a shelf below sits a heavy red book titled *Smallpox and Its Eradication* (1988), which at nearly 1,500 pages is perhaps the longest book ever written about a single disease. Fenner wrote the book with D. A. Henderson, who headed the World Health Organization campaign and is now the top bio-weapons expert in the U.S. government; it has become the field's bible. As the book sets forth in painstaking detail, smallpox killed 25 to 30 percent of those it infected, and blinded and disfigured many of those who survived. Some 300 million people died from smallpox in the twentieth century alone—roughly three times the number who died in armed conflicts.

Fenner's other writings include a book about Australia's attempt to use myxomatosis to control rabbits and one about the family of pox viruses. So it made perfect sense that his Curtin colleague Ian Ramshaw—who had no intention of playing ostrich about the mousepox results but did not want to inadvertently help terrorists—would turn to Fenner for advice.

Fenner's position was clear: he thought the researchers should share their findings. "There was no point in holding up publication, because other people would do the same sort of thing," he told me. And although the results surprised him, he did not see much reason for alarm. "I thought it probably wouldn't work in a way that would make smallpox a more deadly bio-terrorist weapon than it already is," he explained. "If you have something that kills twenty-five percent of the unvaccinated population and spreads reasonably well, then what more can you ask from a bio-weapon?"

Fenner believes that anyone attempting to use a smallpox-IL-4 virus as a weapon would face three main obstacles. First, what worked with mousepox might not work with variola—and terrorists would have no way of testing their construct short of conducting experiments on human beings. Second, a virus that can defeat vaccination poses serious risks for the scientists who engineer it and for anyone who tries to release it. Third, even if terrorists could engineer and

release an IL-4-containing variola that mimicked the mousepox-IL-4 results, the virus would probably kill people so quickly that they would be unable to spread the infection to others, thus negating one of the qualities—contagiousness—that makes smallpox an attractive bio-weapon to begin with. (Bio-terrorists, wanting to be able to control their attacks, have traditionally favored diseases that are not easily spread from person to person, such as Q fever, plague, tularemia, botulism, and anthrax. The relatively recent interest in smallpox and other contagious diseases reflects the increasing recklessness of would-be bio-terrorists.)

Over the next few months Ramshaw polled other colleagues. No one advocated withholding the mousepox data. His thinking was also influenced by the fact that he had published the results of a somewhat similar experiment two years before without raising any hackles. In the earlier experiment Ramshaw's lab had shown that when IL-4 was added to vaccinia (the virus used as the smallpox vaccine) and injected into mice, it slowed the immune system's production of killer cells. This finding was not nearly as worrisome as the mousepox findings: the earlier research simply investigated an immunologic response, not whether it would lead to disease and death, and the scientists did not explore—as they did in the later experiment—whether their virus could defeat vaccine-induced immunity. Still, the idea that smallpox might become more virulent if it contained IL-4 had already appeared in the scientific literature.

Across town, at the Cooperative Research Centre's Pest Animal Control facility, Ron Jackson was similarly seeking advice from colleagues.

The grounds at Pest Animal Control are something of an anomaly in Canberra. Australia's capital city, and one of its few large population centers inland, Canberra is a terrifically tidy place, dominated by shiny new buildings and large street signs that point the way to virtually every destination. Even Canberra's residents commonly refer to it as "sterile." Pest Animal Control, set on the property of an 1862 English-style stone house, is anything but. Located off a rural road at the city's northern edge, the division at first glance resembles a zoo. Red kangaroos hop around in wire-fenced pens, as do their wallaby cousins. Bleating sheep stroll in another enclosure. Foxes occupy a fenced-off area of their own. In addition to the ubiquitous eucalyptus trees, a host of exotic conifers are scattered about the grounds, each with an identifying wooden plaque. Large white cockatiels perch in the canopies.

Inside the laboratories are many kinds of mice and rabbits. Posters in the hallways and offices declare war on the animals (FIGHTING FERALS FOR THE FUTURE OF OUR NATIVE FLORA AND FAUNA, one proclaims). Jackson's lab is in a quiet space in the basement, where there are few distractions. He is a scientist's scientist, choosing his words cautiously ("I wouldn't disagree with that"), questioning every assumption, reining in speculation at every turn. The fact that others had already published findings pertaining

to smallpox and IL-4 did not altogether relieve his fears about sharing the mousepox data. But, like Ramshaw, he also struggled with the possible negative consequences of suppressing the data. "If I'd kept this secret and someone had done IL-4 with humans, and people had died, I couldn't have lived with myself," he told me.

In addition, Jackson faced other, more parochial issues. Unlike his academic collaborators, he reports to a boss who of necessity has the institution's practical goals, not the abstract furthering of knowledge, at the front of his mind. At the time, the head of Pest Animal Control was Bob Seamark. Seamark, in turn, had to answer to a broad constituency of universities, federal agencies, and industry funders.

Earlier in his career Seamark, a reproductive biologist, had become embroiled in a debate about genetically modified organisms after creating transgenic pigs that grew more quickly than normal pigs do. When Jackson told Seamark that the vaccinated mice had died, Seamark

would not be transmitted as readily as the natural form of the virus. "In a biological-warfare system we don't need transmission between people," he said. "We can deliver to every individual, in a variety of ways."

Still, Seamark thought it made no sense to try to quash publication of the mousepox data; in fact, he told me, he yearned for a vigorous public discussion of the issues. His position required him to consult with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization, the main government funder of science, which in turn consulted with the country's Department of Defence. Again, no one expressed any reservations about publishing the data.

Jackson and Ramshaw finished their experiment, analyzing the various immune responses discernible in the blood of surviving mice and in the organs of dead ones. By the time they solicited advice, applied for a patent to protect their invention of an infectious contraceptive vaccine, and drafted a manuscript, more than a year had passed. When they did submit the manuscript, to the *Journal of Virology* in July of 2000, it said nothing about the link between their work and potential bio-weapons. "What we wanted was a presentation of just cool scientific fact," Seamark says. Neither the editors of the journal nor either of the independent scientists who reviewed the paper raised the larger implications.

In December of 2000, a few weeks before the paper was set to appear online, Ramshaw was interviewed by Rachel Nowak, a reporter for *New Scientist* magazine, about AIDS-vaccine work—the main focus of his lab. Nowak asked him if he had anything else interesting under way. In an unguarded moment he told her about the upcoming *Journal of Virology* paper, and even spelled out the dilemma it posed. Nowak shifted gears and pursued the mouse-

pox story full bore.

After the interview Ramshaw realized that his comments might concern his colleagues, so he called Seamark, who says that he expected some uproar but was not upset. "Things like that excite me," he told me. "It's a test of your ability to manage." Seamark then spoke with Nowak, as did Jackson.

On January 10, a few days before the publication of Nowak's mousepox story, *New Scientist* faxed its piece to Seamark, as agreed: the researchers had asked for time to prepare for questions from journalists. Upon seeing the slant of the piece ("Killer Virus: An engineered mouse virus leaves us one step away from the ultimate weapon") and of an accompanying editorial ("The genie is out: Biotech has just sprung a nasty surprise. Next time, it could be catastrophic"), the Cooperative Research Centre prepared a press release, with its own spin, for issue the following day: "Discovery Prompts Call for Biowarfare Review." In it Seamark was quoted as saying that the "best protection against any misuse of



knew he had a problem on his hands. He also knew that if mishandled, the situation could taint the institution.

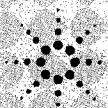
As a scientist, Seamark found the mousepox results deeply disturbing. "We now have the capacity to approach the creation of new pathogens in a Lego-type way—mixing and matching," he told me. "If the purpose is for biological weapons, for evil purposes, we can be as evil as you bloody well like. Be warned." In particular, the speed with which this genetic engineering could be accomplished concerned him. "It's like the transgenic pig that we developed with enhanced growth characteristics," he explained. "The breeders said to us, you've achieved in one year what would take us thirty years to do. We can develop a bug in a fortnight, max. In times of war those are things that become critical. How fast can you be? When can you get the thing out there? How much lab time do you need to do your development and get out before any surveyor comes around?" He took little comfort in the argument that an engineered smallpox

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this technique was to issue a worldwide warning.” The release also highlighted the need to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention, a thirty-year-old agreement among nearly 150 nations not to develop, produce, or stockpile biological-warfare agents except for peaceful purposes. (The treaty has been blatantly violated by several signatories—for instance, the Soviet Union *started* its bio-weapons program the year after signing it—and attempts at crafting verification measures have largely failed. The United States, fearing that drug companies would be forced to reveal trade secrets, has been among those resisting such measures.)

The Cooperative Research Centre release fanned media attention. When Jackson turned on the television on the morning of January 12, he heard a reporter saying that he and his colleagues had re-created smallpox. During the next two weeks the story reverberated across Australia and the world. Jackson found himself fretting about his reputation, the time he was spending talking to reporters, even his family’s safety.

Ramshaw had a more philosophical reaction. “I’m a great believer in the rice-grain hypothesis,” he says. “You have a pile of rice, and if you add one more grain, you can have a massive avalanche. Minor things make a big difference. There are minor things that created this whole issue, such as the publication in *New Scientist*, a reporter coming along to talk.” But he, too, was unprepared for the onslaught of attention. And he experienced some disapprobation: one colleague came up to him and asked, point-blank, “Why did you do this experiment?”

Most of the media reports twisted some aspects of the story and neglected others. Some writers implied that the researchers sat on their data for more than two years as they wrestled with the question of whether to publish. (That probably delayed them no more than six months.) Smallpox with IL-4 is surely not the ultimate bio-weapon; as Fenner argues, it may not even be a very good one. An emphasis on the accidental nature of the discovery—especially coming at a time when debates raged over genetically modified plants, mad-cow disease, and foot-and-mouth—created the mistaken impression that once again arrogant scientists had bumbled, this time creating a Frankenvirus. But most disappointing of all to the Australian researchers is that many stories failed to examine the very question that Ramshaw’s colleague had confronted him with: Why *did* they do this? The impulse informing their work was largely ignored.

DNA ORGIES

The southern shore of San Francisco Bay is home to a host of biotechnology companies. One of them, a company called Maxygen, came into existence because of a technology that, perhaps more than any other, illustrates the hairline borders between bio-medicine, bio-weapons, and bio-defense. The technique, called gene shuffling, was invented by one of the company’s founders, Willem “Pim” Stemmer. It enables scientists to “maximize

genetic diversity”—the phrase from which the company’s name was drawn.

Maxygen’s 1999 annual report describes gene shuffling—which the company also refers to by the trademarked term MolecularBreeding—in a lavish display. Pages 4 and 5 of the glossy report display evenly spaced passport-size photos of thirty-two purebred dogs. Labels on some of the photos identify the dog pictured as a herder, a rescuer, a helper, a worker, a hunter, a fighter, or a racer. “Over thousands of years, humans have used classical breeding to produce dogs that can serve almost any task and survive in almost any environment,” a caption reads. “Maxygen’s MolecularBreeding™ technologies mimic classical breeding at the molecular level, creating new generations of high quality products.”

Maxygen has built its business around the search for new drugs, vaccines, disease-resistant plants, and industrial biochemicals. In addition to helping other companies speed the creation of better drugs to treat allergies, multiple sclerosis, and psychiatric diseases, it is working to develop its own therapies for auto-immune diseases and cancer. The International AIDS Vaccine Initiative has hired Maxygen to help develop an HIV vaccine. And the company has several contracts with the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), the branch of the Defense Department that, among other things, supports high-risk research designed to combat bio-weapons.

The company’s Web site displays a “Statement of Ethical Principles.” The principles are explicit. Maxygen does not do human cloning. It does not “conduct any research intended for use in developing, testing or producing biological weapons.” But the first paper Stemmer published about gene shuffling, when he was working for a business that preceded Maxygen, caused other scientists to posit links between the technology and bio-weapons.

The article, published in a 1994 issue of *Nature*, described the breeding of bacteria. Stemmer had adapted a technology known as the polymerase chain reaction, or PCR. Commonly referred to as a molecular photocopier, PCR works by heating DNA until the strands of the double helix uncoil. Chemicals are then added and the temperature is lowered, allowing each strand to replicate itself and form a new double helix. Repeated many times over, the process can turn minute amounts of DNA into large quantities in a matter of hours.

Working with *E. coli*, Stemmer discovered that PCR could be used to create DNA orgies, in which mixtures of uncoupled strands randomly pair with one another rather than with their twins. Stemmer—who for a time called the technique “sexual PCR”—could then select the new DNA for specific characteristics, much as dog breeders select for hunters or racers. He demonstrated that by using sexual PCR he could quickly “direct evolution” to select for an *E. coli* that was 32,000 times as resistant to a given antibiotic as the *E. coli* with which he had started.

Stemmer’s was another proof-of-concept experiment: the

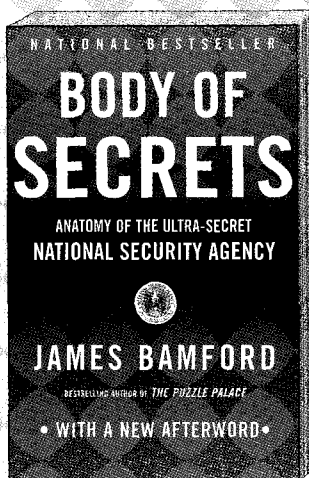
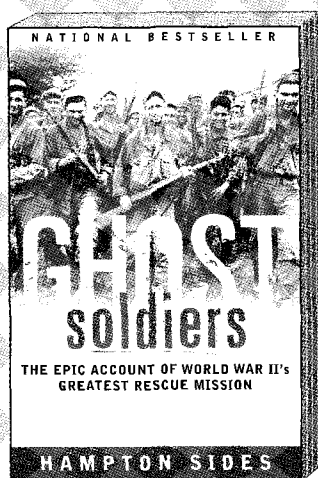
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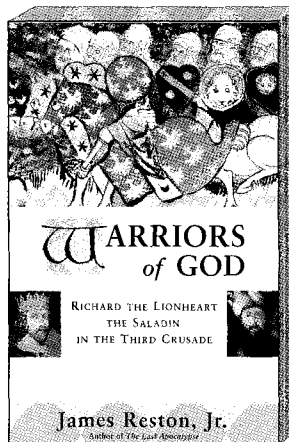
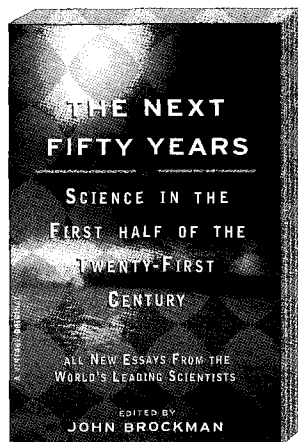
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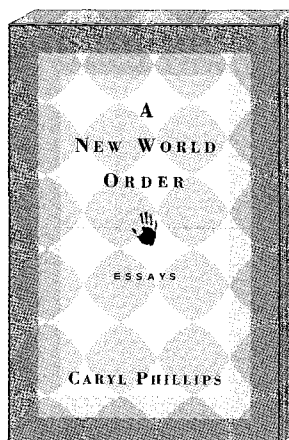
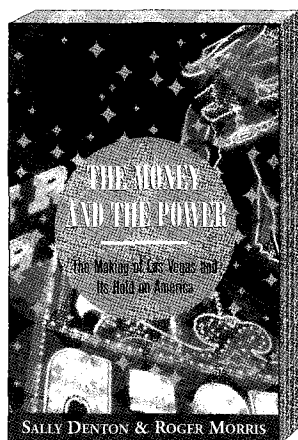
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antibiotic resistance served as a marker, a way to measure success, but was meant to have no practical application. But the experiment generated alarm. Even before Stemmer published his results, the company he was working for at the time, the Affymax Research Institute, in Palo Alto, directed him to stop using antibiotic-resistance markers in his experiments.

When the *Nature* paper appeared, Affymax asked Stemmer not to share his mutant *E. coli* with colleagues. Stemmer says that this caused him some professional pain, since scientists commonly share material with one another. "But we were afraid that someone might, a few years later, find the same mutations in the wild and blame us for having released it. We wanted to make sure that this was not possible," he told me. Stemmer shared the *E. coli* with only one collaborator and stored the rest in a laboratory freezer at -112° .

Maxygen spun off from Affymax in 1996, moving a few miles away to a standard-issue 1970s office park in which one shoebox-shaped building is virtually indistinguishable

from another. Shortly after the move Stemmer received a letter out of the blue from several prominent microbiologists, asking him to destroy his *E. coli*. The officers of the company decided that he should comply with the request. A few days later Stemmer removed the tiny test tubes containing mutant *E. coli* from the freezer. He took them down the hall to an autoclave, an ovenlike device used to sterilize equipment. He then put them in a red biohazard bag and went back to more-meaningful work.

Recalling the incident, Stemmer shakes his head. "It was stupid, it was silly," he says. "Whether it sits in the freezer or gets autoclaved, it really doesn't make much difference. I don't think sending it out would have made much difference either, but we destroyed it for perception purposes."

Stemmer does not dismiss the possibility that terrorists could use novel biotechnologies to create new pathogens. But he questions whether they would bother with gene shuffling, which he says is not a good technology for making a deadlier bug ("I wouldn't know how to do it," he told me). And he points out that many natural pathogens are sufficiently dangerous for a terrorist's purposes. Stemmer emphasizes another illogicality in the objections to his antibiotic-resistance *E. coli* work: his experiment yielded a bug that could, he predicted, evolve naturally under the right conditions. Indeed, four years after Stemmer's *E. coli* paper appeared, another lab reported that it had found a remarkably similar antibiotic-resistant mutation in a patient with pneumonia who was taking an antibiotic closely related to the one he had worked with.

As this story demonstrates, the lines that separate natural and laboratory-made organisms are often blurry, and the distinction between natural and unnatural that looms so large in many people's concern about designer bugs may sometimes be a fiction. Most vaccines, after all, are designer bugs. They are deadly pathogens rendered harmless by scientific manipulation—and they have done more to improve public health than any single measure other than sanitation. This fact should inform our calculations of the threat posed by technologies or experiments that create designer bugs. But it rarely does.

The mousepox story likewise demonstrates that the man-made exotica of biology tend to stir up more fears than natural bugs that may be just as ominous. In 1997, four years before Jackson and Ramshaw published their data in the *Journal of Virology*, a group of researchers from New Zealand and Australia reported in the same journal an astounding finding regarding another relative of smallpox, a virus called Orf. Primarily found in sheep and goats, Orf appears to have picked up a sheep gene that codes for a protein that resembles interleukin-10, a close relative of IL-4 that tilts the immune system's seesaw in similar ways. In other words, nature had already performed an experiment similar to the mousepox-IL-4 study. But outside the small circle of pox virologists, the published de-

BARDO

*... dark wide realm where we walk
with everyone.*

—Thom Gunn

Dangerously frail is what his hand was like
when he showed up at our house,
three or four days after his death
and stood at the foot of our bed.

Though we had expected him to appear
in some form, it was odd, the clarity
and precise decrepitude of his condition,
and how his hand, frail as it was,

lifted me from behind my head, up from the pillow,
so that no longer could I claim it was a dream,
nor deny that what your father wanted,
even with you sleeping next to me,

was to kiss me on the lips.
There was no refusing his anointing me
with what I was meant to bear of him
from where he was, present in the world,

a document loose from the archives
of form—not spectral, not corporeal—
in transit, though not between lives or bodies:
those lips on mine, then mine on yours.

—MICHAEL COLLIER

Michael Collier is the director of the Breadloaf Writers' Conference and a co-director of the creative-writing program at the University of Maryland. His fourth book of poems is The Ledge (2000).

scription of the Orf-IL-10 findings generated little attention.

Recent discoveries about influenza similarly highlight our tendency to fear the unnatural and the unknown over the natural and the familiar. The influenza virus—the cause of the common flu—rarely receives public attention as a potential bio-weapon. The political scientist John Steinbruner, a vice-chair of the arms-control committee of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences and a leading nonscientific voice about bio-weapons, has long wondered why influenza has been left out of discussions about bio-terrorism. “It’s far and away the most dangerous thing out there,” he says. Sergei Popov, a former Soviet bio-weapons scientist who defected to the United States, says that a genetically modified influenza was on the list of potential agents in the Soviet program. Influenza spreads at a faster rate than any other known virus, and immunity is largely strain-specific, which is why scientists must develop a new vaccine each year. Of particular danger are new strains—for example, the highly virulent 1997 Hong Kong flu—and strains that have not circulated for many years; the 1918 Spanish flu caused one of the worst epidemics in recorded history.

Four days before the September terrorist attacks the journal *Science* published two papers that offered new details about those strains. One explored the origins of the genetic changes that may have produced the Spanish flu. The other offered a detailed analysis of those that created the 1997 Hong Kong flu. The papers were accompanied by two editorial commentaries, neither of which mentioned the potential for bio-terrorists to exploit this information.

Because the National Institutes of Health had funded the work of the lead researcher in the study about the Hong Kong strain, a virologist at the University of Wisconsin at Madison named Yoshihiro Kawaoka, it issued a press release about Kawaoka’s article. The headline read, “A SMALL GENETIC CHANGE MAKES FLU VIRUS DEADLY.” Not a single news agency picked up on the bio-weapons implications of the release.

The lack of attention to influenza as a weapon has also surprised Adrian and Mark Gibbs (father and son), researchers at the Australian National University and the authors of the paper about the Spanish strain. I met with them recently in Mark’s lab, which he shares with a dragonfly researcher; hundreds of dead specimens, each floating in its own jar, line the shelves. Mark told me that he finds it “very strange” that people have shown so little interest in influenza as a weapon. “When you think about it, it killed twenty to forty million people in two years,” he said, referring to the 1918 strain. “And the world population was considerably smaller. So in proportionate terms it was a horrendous thing.”

The Gibbsses have deep reservations about a push within the community of influenza researchers to sequence and publish all the genes of the 1918 strain. “That is really dangerous stuff,” Adrian says. “It is totally feasible to reconstruct that virus. And we know that if we got the sequence right, it would

go.” By which he means that the virus, if obtained by terrorists or accidentally released from a legitimate lab, would quickly infect people and spread, possibly killing millions.

The Gibbsses and Kawaoka had no qualms about publishing their work, they told me, explaining that many technical and practical hurdles stand between this information and the ability to make weapons. Strictly speaking, they are right. But the same could be said about the mousepox experiment. The point is not that we have nothing to fear from terrorists’ exploiting the mousepox-IL-4 experiment. Rather, it is that we should beware of letting exaggerations of potential man-made threats blind us to threats that may already exist, hidden in plain sight.

DIRECTING OUR TANGLED DESTINIES

Until last November, D. A. Henderson, Frank Fenner’s collaborator, directed the Center for Civilian Bio-defense Studies at Johns Hopkins University, in Baltimore. After the anthrax attacks he accepted an appointment as director of the newly created Office of Public Health Preparedness, at the Department of Health and Human Services. Henderson well recognizes the threat posed by designer bugs. But he is a practical and blunt man who has studied these issues longer and harder than most, and he speaks with the certainty and inclemency of a soldier who has seen battle. “One can come up with all sorts of what-ifs,” he says. “You can play the Armageddon game very easily. At this point we need to get ourselves prepared to deal with two biological agents: smallpox and anthrax. If we do that, we’re going to be ready to deal with a lot of things.”

The White House has budgeted nearly \$6 billion over the next year to prepare for the threat of bio-terrorism. Henderson expects that we will soon have large stockpiles of vaccines and drugs. The budget also provides for intensive efforts to rebuild the country’s decaying public-health system, increase surge capacity at hospitals, and improve the training of emergency-room staff. Funding for basic research will be sharply increased, which should have long-term payoffs such as better vaccines against potential bio-weapons and effective drugs against some diseases that, like smallpox, are currently untreatable. New systems are being installed to help hospitals improve their reporting of unusual diseases. And bio-sensors that can detect minute amounts of pathogens are under development.

Such measures will not, of course, guarantee that new biological weapons won’t proliferate or that attacks won’t occur. Some analysts therefore advocate a better Biological Weapons Convention—one with teeth. The nuclear truce of the past fifty years proves that negotiations (coupled with threats) can be effective.

In the long term, Henderson and others argue, even strengthening international agreements won’t be as effective as simply helping the developing nations of the world. In this vein it is not hard to imagine that the very technolo-

gies that might lead to bio-terrorism might be used to reduce the threat of it. For instance, although the Canberra researchers abandoned the idea of making a sterilizing vaccine with mousepox plus IL-4, they may try to use it, or some version of it, to kill mice. "It probably could be developed to be one of the best rodenticides on the market," Bob Seamark says. "And using similar ingredients, you might develop one for rats." In that case the mousepox experiment might lead not to a nastier smallpox but to a means of increasing the food supply, and the prosperity, of millions of the world's poor—thus reducing one of the factors that may motivate terrorists. Sitting in his living room, enjoying a glass of whiskey at the end of a fine summer's day, Frank Fenner smiled broadly at the notion. "It's a lovely idea," he said, tinkling the ice in his glass. "It really is."

The National Museum of Australia, in Canberra, houses an exhibit called "Tangled Destinies," about the introduction of rabbits and other species and the attempts to control them. In one glass case rests an old syringe. Behind it a placard explains that in 1951, the year after the myxomatosis release, several people in Murray Valley, one of the affected regions, developed a swelling of the brain. This generated intense public fear that the two events were connected. Three Australian scientists, including Frank Fenner, injected themselves with myxomatosis to prove that they were not. (The culprit turned out to be encephalitis.)

The mistrust of science—the fear that people with an impenetrable language of their own are tinkering with things that are better left alone—has always run deep. In the best cases scientists have responded to this fear head on, encouraging discourse, publicly exploring the limits and the unknowns, and even, as Fenner did, occasionally putting their lives on the line to make a point. There is a growing sense among many biologists that they need to address more directly the issues raised by designer bugs. "From the earliest days of fission and fusion weapons there were physicists who were galvanized to political action," Steven Block says. "In the biological community you haven't seen this kind of response. Part of the reason is that there's been no single transcendent event like the Hiroshima bomb blast." September 11 and the subsequent anthrax attacks, he believes, might prove to be that trigger.

In 1975, amid escalating fears about the newly discovered ability of scientists to transfer DNA from one organism to another, biologists convened a now famous international gathering known as the Asilomar Conference, in Pacific Grove, California, and drew up guidelines for genetic engineering. Molecular biologists need to hold a similar meeting to discuss designer bugs. In the meantime, the National Academy of Sciences has begun selecting members for a committee to study the subject. Margaret Hamburg, an expert on bio-weapons at the Nuclear Threat Initiative, a Washington-based nonprofit organization that is helping to fund the study,

expects that the committee will debate whether it makes sense to restrict scientists' access to sensitive information like the genetic sequence of the 1918 influenza virus. She also hopes that it will discuss improving security in labs, where dangerous material is often kept in unlocked refrigerators, and where background checks on workers are rare.

Such discussions will undoubtedly lead to some useful recommendations. But they are not enough. In the end, scientists, policymakers, and the public should take a lesson from journalism: freedom of speech comes at a steep price, but it's well worth it.

Scientists and journalists have much in common. Both investigate subjects and report their findings, with little control over where those ideas will lead or what effect they will have on others. Both cherish independence of thought. Both grimace at the muck that some of their colleagues put into print; but when the muck becomes dangerous (HIV doesn't cause AIDS; one race is inferior to another), counterbalances come into play, chiefly in the form of public criticism.

On occasion scientists and journalists withhold what they know. Scientists routinely do this if they have yet to file a patent application for a discovery. Journalists often omit troop locations and other sensitive details from their stories, for reasons of national security. But in such instances the decision to withhold is made by individuals or the institutions they work for. And so it should continue.

But if scientists do not stand up for themselves, the government will step in; indeed, it has begun to do so. In February, *The New York Times* revealed that the Bush Administration had quietly removed from public access thousands of long-available federal reports about germ warfare, and had begun drafting a new "information security" policy. White House science advisers have had exploratory discussions with the American Society for Microbiology, which publishes ten journals, including the *Journal of Virology*, about the possibility of withholding potentially dangerous articles, or at least excising details that would allow other labs to replicate the work described.

Mandating that review panels assess which scientific studies should be censored would reek of the way things worked in the former Soviet Union—and it would surely backfire. Such policies are ham-fisted and, in the end, counterproductive. Knowing the mousepox data, scientists can now work on fashioning vaccines and drugs to combat an enhanced version of smallpox, should it ever surface as a weapon. The experiment also crucially raised our awareness of the threats posed by designer bugs and garden-variety pathogens alike. On balance, then, the publication of the mousepox data and the intense discussions surrounding it have in all likelihood made the world a safer place. ▀

Jon Cohen has written extensively about vaccines for Science magazine. His story "The Hunt for the Origin of AIDS" appeared in the October 2000 issue of The Atlantic. He is the author of Shots in the Dark: The Wayward Search for an AIDS Vaccine (2001).

THE MALL OF AMERICA

*The warm oblivion and eternal present tense
of the country's largest mall*

BY IAN FRAZIER

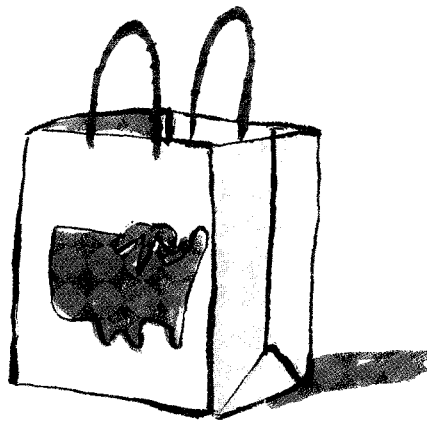
Illustrations by Eric Hanson

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I used to fly in and out of Minneapolis-St. Paul all the time. When you come in to land there, or soon after you take off, usually you can see just to the south of the airport a huge shape battened to the earth like a Garfield doll stuck to the inside of a car window. The shape is the Mall of America, the largest mall in the United States. It's basically a rectangle with four smaller rectangles at its corners, like Garfield's suction-cup paws. The four rectangles house Sears, Macy's, Nordstrom, and Bloomingdale's, the "anchor stores" of the Mall. As it clings, the spraddled shape seems to curve slightly with the earth's roundness.

Sometimes when I came to the airport the Mall of America was among my local destinations. I am an author, and like many in my profession, I am also a traveling salesman, going all over in an attempt to persuade people to spend twenty-five dollars on a hardcover book by me. On two or three book tours I have visited bookstores in the Mall of America and signed copies of my books and introduced myself to store employees who I hope will sell them. Signing books at the Mall of America (or places like it) has become a characteristic experience of the writing life.

Once I was on a book tour and the singer John Denver happened to be following the same bookstore route as I, just a day ahead. He had a book out, but I forget what it was. When I went to a store called Readwell's in the Mall of America, the store manager, a young woman, told me that the day before, John Denver had sat at the same signing table where I was sitting. She added that, true to his hippie persona, John Denver often used the exclamation "Oh, wow!" She said that he had used it so much while at Readwell's that she had gotten a piece of paper and begun to



count the times. She showed me the paper, which was a series of lines like HHT. She had counted them up, and found that during his visit John Denver said "Oh, wow!" at least forty-seven times. John Denver died in a crash while piloting his own plane a few years afterward.

That Readwell's has since closed. At the Mall of America, stores come and go with regularity; when a new one opens, sometimes it's hard to remember what was there before. In

that respect the Mall is like television—you know what you're watching when you're watching it, but it slips from your mind when new images appear. At malls, as on TV, history becomes feeble. If I were alone in the Mall, I might drift in an endless present tense, as I do in front of the TV in my hotel room at night, watching whatever's on. As it happens, however, I am not alone on book tours at the Mall. Going from one sales appointment to the next, authors nowadays are usually in the company of author escorts—people who know the local bookstores and media and who drive the authors where they're supposed to go and see that all proceeds smoothly. In the Twin Cities my escort is always a young man named Tim Hedges. Of the dozens of escorts I've had, I rate Tim at the very top.

Tim is tall, with hazel eyes and a wholesome midwestern face. A generous sprinkling of freckles would not be out of place on it if he had them, but somehow he doesn't. They would clash, anyway, with his short hair moussed into spikes, and the shades around his neck on a cord, and the cool Euro grays, blacks, and tans he dresses in. Tim grew up a few miles from the Mall of America, and his memory of the area goes back a ways. When I walk through the Mall with Tim, history revives. "I once took Marianne Faithfull to

a movie in that movie theater,” Tim will say, as we pass the Mall’s multiplex (Faithfull was an author-client he escorted years ago; she had to keep leaving the theater, and the Mall, to smoke). Or he’ll recall, at a boarded-up window, “This used to be a store that sold only hot sauce.” Or he’ll note, “I once spent three hours at a table in front of this store helping Mankind, the professional wrestler, sign copies of his autobiography.”

Or, “Once I and a lot of other people worked on an event here on the stage in the Mall rotunda for a celebrity author, who was supposed to read from a book of her poetry. There were hundreds of people in the audience, and a guy got up to introduce her, and meanwhile she was sitting on a chair behind him on the stage talking on her cell phone. So the guy finishes his introduction, and the poet walks up to the podium, and she’s still talking on her cell phone, and she holds up her hand like that, and the audience waits for a few minutes while she finishes her conversation. Then she puts the phone away and starts to read.”

The Mall and its parking lots cover seventy-eight acres in the city of Bloomington, a suburb just south of the Twin Cities. The Mall structure itself encloses about forty-five of those acres. It is as tall as an eight-story building. Its more than 500 retail stores, plus restaurants, food courts, movie theaters, a bank, a clinic, a wedding chapel, and a business school called National American University, occupy the outer part of the enclosed space, extending down long corridors on four levels. The center of the Mall, a space of about seven acres, is open to the skylights in the ceiling far above. There are trees growing from the floor in this central space, and an amusement park, Camp Snoopy, with a roller coaster, a seventy-four-foot-high Ferris wheel, and a log flume ride whose chlorinated water gives the conditioned air the scent of an indoor swimming pool. Here the Mall floor rolls in small rises and dips, perhaps to encourage the illusion that it is earth and not cement painted gray.

The first time I went to the Mall, Tim took me on a quick detour to an obscure corner of Camp Snoopy. He said he had something he really wanted me to see. Set into the gently rolling gray-painted floor, between a shooting gallery and a photo shop where you could get an old-fashioned picture of yourself in old-fashioned clothes, was a historical marker in the shape of home plate. Made of copper or brass, it bore the words “Metropolitan Stadium Home Plate” and the years “1956–1981.”

Had he shown me the site of Alice’s rabbit hole, I could not have been more pleased. In this mall innocent of history, in the retail environment’s eternal present, the plaque in the floor opened a vista to the past like a wide-screen keyhole. Time really did exist, contrary to what the Mall would have us believe. Specifically: Metropolitan Stadium, Minneapolis–St. Paul’s venue for big-league baseball and football, once

stood where the Mall now stands. From the sixties until the eighties the Minnesota Twins, of the American League, and the Minnesota Vikings, of the National Football Conference, played here. The small space marked by the home-plate plaque once had more than a hundred thousand eyes focused on it (game seven of the 1965 World Series, between the Twins and the Los Angeles Dodgers, drew 50,596 fans). In the early 1980s the Twins and the Vikings moved to a new stadium, and developers tore down Metropolitan Stadium to build the Mall.

A book tour is not a good opportunity to let your mind wander. You have to pay attention, remember salespeople’s and interviewers’ names, succinctly summarize your book in a “selling” way, and so on. But when I saw the home-plate plaque, I forgot about that for a moment and sat down on a rustic log bench nearby. In the plaque’s immediate airspace invisible fastballs, curve balls, and sliders went zipping by. My mind fell into flashback mode, with few hard facts to go on (though later research supplied them). Before the Twins moved here, they were the Washington Senators, a team usually described with the epithet “hapless,” as they sat year after year at the bottom of the league. Calvin Griffith, then their owner, once said he moved them to Minnesota because of Minnesota’s lack of black people. “You’ve got good, hard-working white people here,” Griffith said, explaining that they were a better audience for baseball. (Griffith’s black players objected to his remarks, and he semi-apologized.) In the Twins’ first ten years in Minnesota they improved a lot from when they were the Senators, and also led the American League in attendance.

A man and a woman pushing a crying baby in a stroller stopped on top of the home-plate plaque, unaware of where they were. The baby had already forgotten what she was crying about and looked up mildly at her parents with fresh tears still on her cheeks. The man said, “Do we eat first, and then go to the science museum?” The woman looked down at the baby and asked, “Do you want to do that, Katybug?” The man was standing just to the left of the plate. Hall of Famer Harmon Killebrew, the greatest Twin long-ball hitter ever, who batted right, stood there many times on the way to a lifetime total of 573 home runs. Rod Carew, another Twins great, batted from the left side as he racked up base hits seemingly at will. Indeed, most players of the period in the American League, and some in the National, vied over that piece of ground at one time or another—Carlton Fisk and Carl Yastrzemski and Thurman Munson and Dennis Eckersley and Mark Fidrych and Zoilo Versalles and Jim Rice and Roberto Clemente and Willie Stargell ... From the nearby air I conjured Eckersley’s long hair and drooping moustache, and the angle of the baseball caps sitting on top of the tall afros that some of the black players wore back then.

The couple with the stroller moved off, and a few moments later a woman with long, stringy hair bleached blonde at the ends and a man with a tattoo of a coyote baying at



the moon drifted over the plate. They stood among the ballplaying phantoms with their heads close together, consulting a small folding map of the Mall. On a June day in 1967 Killebrew stepped up to the plate and swung his whip-fast bat and hit the longest home run ever in Metropolitan Stadium. I pictured the ball sailing from someplace near the man's tattooed shoulder far up into the higher regions, where support girders around the Mall's immense air-conditioning ducts are now. So much controlled violence in these few cubic feet of space, to disappear so thoroughly!

Tim Hedges was telling me about the best times he had in Met Stadium, back in the seventies, when he and his friends used to come here on summer nights to watch a pro soccer team called the Minnesota Kicks. He said you could get any kind of drugs or alcohol you wanted in the parking lot, and the stands—he gestured up to his left and right, where the stands had been—were like one big party. Some kind of subverbal trigger in his words caused me to know exactly what he was talking about. Summer partying in the seventies in the Midwest: I had done it myself in Ohio, with my friends, at an outdoor concert arena called Blossom Music Center, in the country between Cleveland and Akron.

Our dope probably even came from the same shipment they were selling up here. I was not that much of a doper. I did drink a lot of beer, though. As Tim talked, I remembered sitting on the grass during a Blood, Sweat & Tears concert, when a girl named Kathy and I invented a game involving a Marlboro cigarette, a bottle of Stroh's beer, and a freshly plucked leaf from the weedy lawn. The game was basically just passing these three things—taking a hit from the ciga-

rette, swigging from the beer, handing along the leaf, and keeping all three moving pretty fast. The game occupied both hands and took concentration, and the mental effort got us even higher as we leaned toward each other, and Kathy's lips were a pleasure to receive a beer bottle or a cigarette from. She and I never had a romance, but playing that beer-cigarette-leaf game on the grass at Blossom was better than some romances I had.

Now I imagined this space without a ceiling, encircled by grandstands, open to the Minnesota summer night. At eighteen in Ohio, I used to go out in summer nights that were warm, slightly hazy, echoing with unmuffled car engines; nights with a buoyant softness in the air, and maybe the scent of freshly turned earth from a farm field, and a gradually darkening summer sky that seemed almost combustible with possibility: the kind of night

when you're eighteen and you step out on the front stoop and close the door behind you and you're *sure* that something exciting is just about to happen. For a moment a memory of those nights hit me, taking me by surprise in the midst of my traveling-author life. In the next moment the vividness of the memory was gone.

Tim knew I knew what he was talking about, though. History is memory shared, even when what's remembered has no particular significance or drama. For a while longer we stood in the timeless time zone hovering around the home-plate plaque. Then we went on our way, one foot after the other, selling in the Mall.

Recently I returned to the Mall to check it out again. I happened to be in Minnesota on other business and had some spare time. I wondered what the Mall would be like when I wasn't just passing through on a book tour. Also, several local people had told me that the Mall was either the main terrorist target in Minnesota or the only terrorist target in Minnesota. I arrived before most of the stores in the Mall had opened, and I walked around for a while outside—an unrewarding experience. On one side was the plain blank wall, on the other the parking lot. Architecturally, the Mall's windowless exterior has about as much character as the exterior of the cartons that contain the products it sells. Many security cameras watch in and around the Mall, and down in the basement guards scan banks of the TV screens the cameras are connected to. I didn't see any of the cameras myself. No police squads and no soldiers patrolled. The only security change I noticed

was a policy regarding kids fifteen and under: now they must be accompanied by an adult if they come to the Mall after six in the evening on Fridays and Saturdays. This policy has existed for some time and is not aimed at terrorism.

Inside, the Mall was as I remembered. The same sense of warm oblivion prevailed. Unchanged, too, was the jingling thrill of acquisitive success that always seemed to be occurring just beyond where I could see. On the third floor was the only obvious sign of September 11 I could find: a small store called USA America Pride, which sold various clothes and knickknacks on a patriotic theme. The space looked familiar to me, and I asked the young man behind the counter what had been there before. He said the previous tenant was a store that took your picture and put it on the cover of a magazine and made a poster of it for you. Then I remembered passing by this space with Tim Hedges and noticing the faces of assorted Mall customers smiling out from enlarged "Man of the Year" covers of *Time* magazine.

Not a single item in the USA America Pride store was made in America. I knew that already, just from common sense, but I began looking at the labels anyway. Blue baseball cap with the letters "FDNY" in white outlined in black on the front: Honduras. Black T-shirt with "Born in the U.S.A." in red-white-and-blue letters: Honduras. Black baseball cap with "American Pride" in red-white-and-blue spangles: Bangladesh. T-shirt with comical image involving bin Laden and a camel: Dominican Republic. Coffee mug with picture of Twin Towers: China. And so on. I asked the young man behind the counter if the store had ever sold any products made in America, and he said he thought there might have been one or two, but he couldn't remember. "If we did sell stuff made in America, you couldn't afford it," he said. "It's just not cost-effective to make such small items."

In fact, most of what the entire Mall sells was made someplace far away. Reading labels in the USA America Pride store put me in an international mood, so I went to store after store on a label-reading binge, collecting countries like a grade-school student doing a geography project. I had not known that the Tommy Hilfiger "Classic Fit" line of blue jeans is made in Turkmenistan. Indeed, a year ago I couldn't have told you where Turkmenistan is, or that it shares a border with Afghanistan. I now know where the United Arab Emirates is too, and that many of its citizens don't like us; somebody there is making a lot of spaghetti-strap tops for Abercrombie & Fitch. The (I assume) hip clothing for sale at the New York & Company store is made not in New York but in China, Thailand, Indonesia, Korea, and India. The clothes at Banana Republic come from Turkey, China,

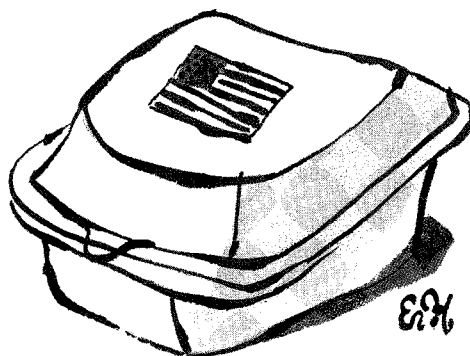
Hong Kong, and Macao, none of them banana republics. The Chinese workers who carefully paint the little details on the faces of chess pieces in the shapes of characters from *The Simpsons* (Marge as queen, Homer as king, Lisa as rook, Bart as pawn, and so on) probably have a general idea who those characters are. But what do the Chinese think of the loon snow globes, Christmas ornaments in the shape of sledding moose, Swedish farmer figurines, and other Minnesota-themed souvenirs they make for the Love From Minnesota store? Label after label, the countries piled up: Mexico, Sri Lanka, Bahrain, Cambodia, Jamaica, the Philippines, Peru, Mauritius ... A few countries were prominent by their absence; I found nothing that was made in North Korea, Iraq, or Iran.

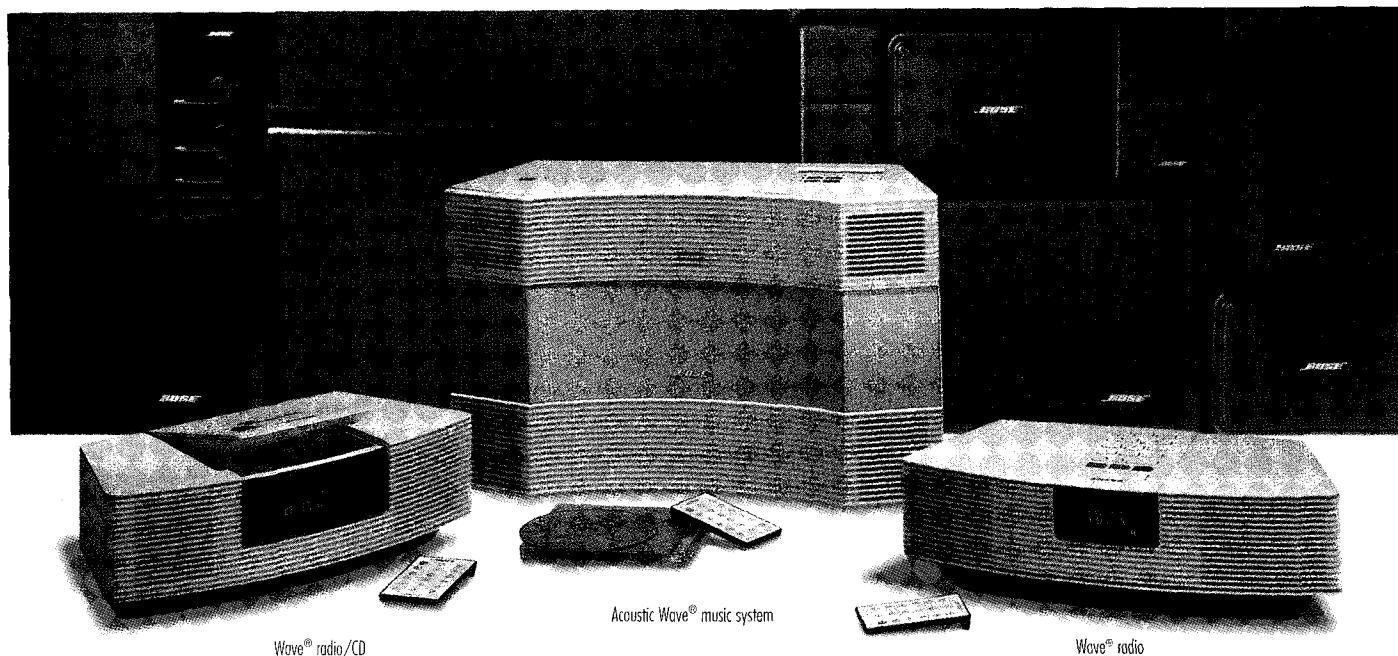
After a while I went down some stairs near the Mall's east entrance to the basement, where the administrative offices are. A security guard studied my ID, studied me, signed me in, and passed me through a door to another security guard. This security guard told me that probably

nobody was in the offices just now, because all the employees were celebrating the opening of a McDonald's, the first in the Mall. "Before, it was only Burger King," the guard said, chewing, behind a desk piled high with Big Mac and french-fry packaging. Soon a woman named Lou Ann Olson, a media-relations specialist, came out and talked to me. She said she couldn't comment on any new security measures at the Mall, referring me to someone higher

up who wasn't there then. She also said that the Mall will have its tenth anniversary this August 11, and will mark it with a big event the details of which are still sketchy. I asked her if there was any larger mall in the world. She said yes, a mall in Edmonton, Alberta, is larger. It doesn't draw nearly as many customers as the 42.5 million that come to this mall each year. She said that soon the Mall will build an addition to its northern side, where parking lots are now. After the addition this will be the largest mall in the world.

I thanked her and left and walked around some more. Once, when I was here with Tim Hedges, he led me through a door and down a back staircase and into another part of the Mall basement, where cavernous, high-ceilinged concrete corridors lit by bare light bulbs dwindled into a far distance of converging perspective lines, and small figures on forklifts crossed occasionally. A persistent but not overpowering smell of garbage—the Mall recycles a lot of its trash down there—made the place a sketch of an up-to-date infernal underworld. And somehow Tim and I had then climbed other stairs and found ourselves in the space behind the stores, between their back walls and the outer wall of the Mall. The Mall stores are like stage sets,





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and this odd between space is the Mall's backstage, full of cardboard boxes and two-by-fours and old caulking guns and wiring and blind alleys. Now, though I looked and looked, I couldn't find Tim's door. I was getting hungry, and feared I'd lose my train of thought if I ate in the Mall. As soon as I slid into the driver's seat of my car, in my good parking space right by the Mall's south door, cars clustered around behind me, panting for me to leave.

The thing to remember when you're driving west on I-494 near the Mall is to stay out of the right-hand lane. Unless you want to exit immediately, that is, because again and again the right-hand lane becomes an "exit only" lane, and getting out of it can be tough in traffic. At many hours of the day I-494 stutters and pulses and groans with a great mass of traffic, like those high-voltage urban power lines so freighted with current that they crackle with the volume of it. I used to think driving was fun. I am amazed to recall that now. My friends and I used to drive around aimlessly night after night. We would get in Jim Graham's father's Cougar and cruise, up and down the country roads near our Ohio town, and from stoplight to stoplight on the commercial highway strips farther away. What possessed us?

The throng of vehicles soon shouldered me off at an exit a few miles from the Mall, and I found a hotel there and checked in. I had an early dinner at a Perkins Restaurant (walleyed pike, a Minnesota specialty, very tasty), and the next morning went back to the Perkins for breakfast. The place was packed, so I took a seat at the counter. In a few minutes a man sat on the stool beside me. He was in his mid-sixties, with a full head of hair, dark eyes, and a florid face highlighted by broken capillaries. He said something to the waitress and then turned to me. "She didn't like to hear that," he said, "but if I hadn't said anything, they would have made the hash browns the way they did last time—so overcooked they were crunchy. Well, I'm the one that's paying, so I guess I ought to be able to get my hash browns cooked like I want."

I was barely awake and didn't really feel like talking, but we fell into conversation. The guy said he was a dry cleaner. He owned the largest dry cleaning business in a nearby town. He said that his was the richest town its size in the country. No other town has as many millionaires *and billionaires* as this one. All the rich people from Minneapolis moved out there and have houses on a lake. They all got their clothes dry cleaned, and some of them sent him everything down to sheets and towels and underwear. There were rich families he knew who spent ten thousand a month on dry cleaning, although you might not believe it. He did \$1.4 million of business last year. He was doing more business than any dry cleaner maybe in the country. Some of his customers also had houses in New York City, and when they went there they FedExed their laundry back to him

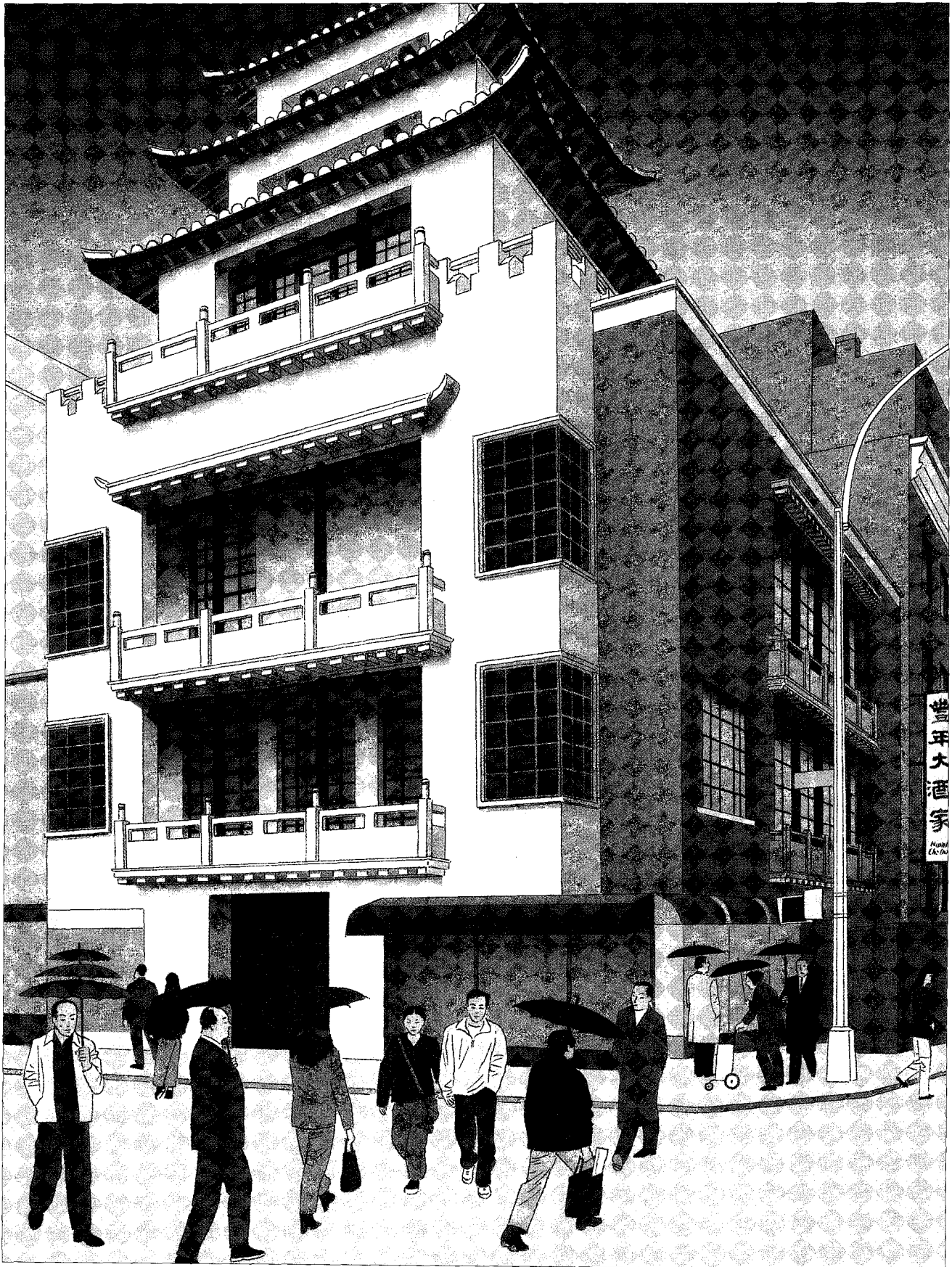
overnight and he cleaned it and FedExed it back to them.

He expanded on various dry-cleaning themes—stains, and the good work ethic of his Vietnamese employees. Eventually the topic turned to Minneapolis's large population of Somalis, whom he called *Simoleons*, confusingly. He said they sponsored terrorism and should all be kicked out of the country. I felt it would be awkward to disagree, so I got up and paid my check and said good-bye. He had a puzzled look in his eyes. We had been chatting amicably up till then. Before he got onto the Simoleons, much of what he had been saying was familiar music to me. I knew it from my childhood: out here we had the biggest and the most and the best. For us in Ohio, the kids of Shaker Heights were the smartest, the football teams of Canton the toughest, the track stars of Akron East High the fastest. Our cars were fastest too, and the women beautiful to a mythic, indescribable degree.

Anything you wanted might be Out There somewhere. The dream was of amplitude. Our two-lane country road was an aisle through cornfields under white, high clouds, and it went on indefinitely and came out who knew where. And amplitude extended on all sides. You might be walking down the street in the Chicago suburb of Oak Park, Illinois, and look up from the sidewalk and across a wide lawn to an imposing house just at eye level on a rise, and the front door would be open, and far back in the house the back door would be open too, and you could see clear down the center hall to the light coming through, and in the hall an annoyed young woman surrounded by light was pushing the head of a mop with her foot, not thinking of you, not knowing you existed ... The hopes we had are as evanescent as *confetti*, harder to pin down than the reasons we went cruising every night. But the hopes were real; they drove us all.

From the parking lot of the Perkins Restaurant, I could see the gas-station parking lot next to it, and more parking lots beyond, and a six-lane road leading to a bridge over another six-lane road. Buildings that differed from the Mall of America only in size spread across the landscape all around, close enough to one another that a person wearing half-league boots could jump from one roof to the next for mile after mile—from the Mall of America to the vast Sportsmart store to Office Depot to Old Navy to Toys "Я" Us to Target, pausing finally at yet another local mall, the Southdale Shopping Center, the world's first enclosed shopping mall, built in 1956 by a Minneapolis department-store owner in order to provide comfortable indoor shopping during the cold Minnesota winters. Southdale is the original of the Mall of America, and of all malls. It's the seed crystal that continues to grow, turning the limitlessness of the Midwest into a limitlessness that holds no surprise. ▀

Ian Frazier is the author of a number of books, including Family (1994), Coyote v. Acme (1996), and On the Rez (2000), and a frequent contributor to The Atlantic. His collection The Fish's Eye: Essays About Angling and the Outdoors was published in April.



CHINOISERIE by Guy Billout

ANSEL ADAMS AT 100

*The photographer would not have been pleased
by this new retrospective*

BY KENNETH BROWER

Photographs by Jon Lowenstein

.....

As a boy, I watched the epochal photo exhibit "This Is the American Earth" come together in 1955 at Ansel Adams's studio in Yosemite Valley. Three years later, at the photographer's house in San Francisco, I witnessed the exhibit's transformation into a book. My vantage point in San Francisco was the edge of the big, image-strewn table where the book's layout was done. My strategy was to keep quiet. I remember the clarity of Adams's original prints. I can still see the gradations of his grays—no other darkroom maestro had his control of halftones—and the darkness of his darks. Of all the great black-and-white photographers, Ansel Adams was the blackest and the whitest. Those strong contrasts, his trademark, seem to have fixed themselves indelibly in my memory. I remember the creative electricity among the three collaborators: Adams; the exhibit designer Nancy Newhall, who wrote the text; and my father, David Brower, who edited the book.

Adams was even then recognized as the foremost landscape photographer on earth. Half the images in the book were his. He was a balding, bearded, crooked-nosed man, self-taught, energetic, excited by ideas, a great ham and mimic and comedian. At his piano he was an entertainer in the style of Victor Borge, playing chords with an orange or, if no fruit was handy, with his rear end. By day, in the darkroom, he was an ascetic. In the evening, after happy hour, he turned sybarite. This oscillating regimen had left him with a paunch and had compromised his health, delicate since childhood. In the history of his art Adams was an unprecedented combination of technical virtuosity and inspired eye. He had trained to be a concert pianist, and his approach to photography—his perfectionism, his mastery of tonal scales, the operatic feeling in his grander images—was essentially musical. Adams took photography into a big, moody, exhilarating, Wagnerian country of inky peaks and dazzling snowfields, where no one had climbed before.

The idea of *This Is the American Earth* was to somehow fit the drama and spaciousness of big exhibit prints between

hard covers. Adams believed that size had its own dynamic. When the eye can take in an image at a glance, that makes one sort of experience. When the eye must travel around the image to make sense of it (and this is the eye's normal itinerary in the real world), that is kinesthesia and liberation, and it makes for an experience of an entirely different sort. My father later joked that he would have liked to publish the book on 4' x 8' panels, like those in the exhibit, but in the end he and Adams settled on pages of 10 1/4" x 13 1/2".

The hundredth anniversary of Ansel Adams's birth has been celebrated in a spate of exhibits and commemorative articles. Included, as always with Adams criticism, has been a great deal of misappraisal. Critics—East Coast critics in particular—often misunderstood the photographer and routinely panned his work. The absence of people from his pictures has been particularly galling to New York reviewers; Adams's depopulated landscapes strike many urbanites as misanthropic and cold.

"There is a person in every one of my photographs," I once heard Adams tell my father with asperity. At first I did not get it, and then I did: on Ansel Adams's starkest granite wall, in his emptiest desert landscape, a person is always present, and that person is Adams himself.

His critics have conceded Adams his pre-eminence in the history of modern photography, his eloquent composition, his technical mastery of printmaking, his ingenious "zone system," and his vast influence as a teacher. But the consensus seems to be that Adams did all these things too well. Today in photography we are seeing a retreat from Adams-style classicism, a glorification of images that look accidental. Photographers with whom I work, men and women who spent years mastering their trade, are dismayed by this development. Morning is no longer the photographer's hour. The young editor or curator complains about the prettiness of low-angle light. Couldn't the photographer shoot more at noon, when the light flattens everything out?

Where is the irony? (By which the postmodernist means a kind of empty hipness.) Does everything have to be so sharply in focus? So *composed*? Couldn't we blur things more, to suggest movement? The photographer hurries home to search the wastebasket for rejects.

His critics dismiss Adams as a romanticizer. The real America, they point out, is a land of strip malls, asphalt, power lines, and blight, not a land of waterfalls and forests. Adams's vision, they argue, is wishful and false. The very reviewers who argue for greatness in the work of Diane Arbus, who specialized in photographing circus freaks and the inmates of asylums, find Adams, whose subject is the planet Earth, hopelessly selective.

Last August, *Vanity Fair* published "Visions of Majesty," an appraisal of Adams by the photography critic Vicki Goldberg. I tucked the article, fresh off the press, into my backpack and carried it over Piute Pass, in the Sierra Nevada, and into the heart of Ansel Adams country. Beside Muriel Lake, my back to a white granite boulder under Mount Humphreys, I opened the magazine. After a paragraph or two I commenced muttering—a voice in the John Muir Wilderness. Vicki Goldberg has insightful things to say about Adams, but she embodies all his old troubles with New York.

"*Lake and Cliffs, Sierra Nevada*," she writes, "records a remoteness and implacability so bleak, hard, and cold that they would provoke terror were they not so admirably encompassed by a rectangular frame."

The remoteness that made Goldberg shudder is just half a day's hike from the roadhead, on the east side of the mountain range where I happily spent all my childhood summers. What Goldberg imagines as implacability, John Muir knew as "gentle wilderness." A coldness does emanate from Adams's *Lake and Cliffs, Sierra Nevada*, but it is an invigorating coldness. What provokes terror in me is a sensibility that could be terrorized by a photograph of ice in a lake. Truly horrific is the prospect of new generations of Americans so urbanized, so estranged from the American earth, that they are frightened by the photography of Ansel Adams.

Goldberg proposes that Adams, for all his good intentions, was an enemy of nature. "In a paradox inherent to photography, Adams himself surely contributed to the problem," she writes. Inspired by his images, "we loaded our cars and set out for the unspoiled wilderness, only to find we had spoiled it," she says. "You might say that Adams was simply too good. He touched both an aesthetic and an emotional chord, and drew people to his sources. He loved

the wilderness both wisely and well, yet for all that, he may have loved the land nearly to death."

This is nonsense. What despoils wilderness, as any student of that despoliation knows, is not backpackers, campers, and fishermen but miners, logging companies, oil drillers, and the like. Wilderness is spoiled not by love but by greed. The only thing that has ever saved wilderness, a single acre of it, is a constituency—people who have come, who have *seen*, who care about wildness, fight for it, vote for it. Ansel Adams was a pioneer in building that constituency. He believed that art could influence the world, and from early in his career he volunteered his photographs in the cause of conservation. If Adams was responsible for a braided trail or two across an alpine meadow, and for a few charred fire-pit stones, those infractions were vastly offset by the good his photographs did—the conservation campaigns they buttressed, the public enlightenment they brought.



"In the 1960s, art lost faith in beauty too, preferring Campbell's soup cans and rows of bricks to sunsets," Goldberg writes. "At the same time, people were becoming aware that the land Adams found so achingly beautiful scarcely existed outside his photographs any longer." She repeats this notion later on: "In fact, a good part of the wilderness that is left exists mainly in Ansel Adams's photographs, which is what most people see anyway—landscapes not of earth but of emulsion."

From where I sat, the *Vanity Fair* article thrown down in irritation, I could look along Piute Canyon to the timberline forest where my father, descending from a climb in 1933, first met Ansel Adams. White-bark pines and other high-altitude conifers grow excruciatingly slowly. The forest below me was scarcely taller than it had been when the two men crossed paths seventy years before. What had passed since then in the High Sierra was not historical but geological time—which is to say that time had hardly passed at all. A few rockfalls had doubtless made slight alterations in the peaks around—Bear Creek Spire, Mount Julius Caesar, the Seven Gables—but I doubt that Adams would have noticed any difference. Goethe Glacier had perhaps shrunk infinitesimally. Desolation Lake was slightly more or slightly less desolate. But the John Muir Wilderness had not passed into some oblivion, as Vicki Goldberg seems to imagine.

"You must be Ansel Adams," my father suggested. Adams agreed. Tripod over his shoulder, he complained about the early-morning cumulus clouds, too fuzzy to photograph. Clouds—wisps of fog scudding over San Francisco—were

Adams's first memory, and clouds would remain a favorite subject for the rest of his life. The mountain thunderheads he loved, and the lens clouds, and the afternoon cumuli, still form over the Sierra. The scene in *Half Dome, Winter, Yosemite* looks exactly as it did. So do those in *The Teton, Thunderstorm* and *Old Faithful Geyser, Yellowstone National Park*. Recalling Adams's work, I am hard put to think of a famous image that is not still there in actuality. A bridge now crosses the Golden Gate, which was an open strait when Adams first photographed it. A road scar now crosses the glacier-polished granite captured in his *Tenaya Lake, Yosemite*. (Together he and my father fought hard but unsuccessfully to stop that desecration.) The tiny village in *Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico, 1941* has no doubt changed since his famous photograph of the place. But for the most part Adams's inspiration is all still there.

Today it would be impossible to duplicate a Diane Arbus or a picture by the French photojournalist Henri Cartier-Bresson—fashion and the zeitgeist have changed too much. But if you mastered Adams's "zone system," and if you had the maestro's eye, and if clouds and the sun conspired with you, as they always seemed to conspire with him, you could reproduce almost all his signature pieces. Ansel Adams photographed an immutable truth that will survive all our cities, every artistic fad and theory, and *Homo sapiens* itself.

The most heralded of the Adams centennial exhibits is "Ansel Adams at 100," which opened in August of last year at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, moved on to Chicago and London, and will travel through 2003 to Berlin, Los Angeles, and New York. The exhibit was organized by John Szarkowski, the director emeritus of the Department of Photography at New York's Museum of Modern Art.

I wondered about the choice. MOMA was anathema to Adams. He was one of the founders of its Department of Photography, and he collaborated with Szarkowski in a 1979 show of his work at the museum, but the photographer's history at MOMA was a contentious one. Edward Steichen, Szarkowski's predecessor as MOMA's director of photography, was Adams's *bête noire*, as Szarkowski himself has said. (Adams put it even more strongly: he called Steichen "The anti-Christ of Photography.") MOMA's staff and habitués were often puzzled by Adams's work. "The world is going to pieces and people like Adams and Weston are photographing rocks!" Cartier-Bresson, a MOMA favorite, once complained.

This seems to have been the basic objection of the eastern critical establishment—that Adams lacked social relevance. But even when the photographer attempted relevance, he fared poorly at MOMA. The fate of his exhibit "Born Free and Equal" is a case in point. In 1943 Adams had photographed the Japanese-American internment camp at Manzanar, on the east side of the Sierra Nevada, producing what he felt was the most

important social commentary of his career. Nancy Newhall, who concurred in this assessment, arranged a Manzanar show for Adams at MOMA. One of her panels displayed the Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees due process to citizens of all races, and quoted an 1855 letter by Abraham Lincoln:

As a nation we began by declaring that "all men are created equal." We now practically read it as "all men are created equal except Negroes." When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read, "all men are created equal, except Negroes and foreigners and Catholics." When it comes to this, I shall prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty.

This was too strong for MOMA's patriotic board. The museum twice canceled the exhibition and finally showed it only after the Lincoln panel had been removed and the title changed from "Born Free and Equal" to "Manzanar: Photographs by Ansel Adams of Loyal Japanese American Relocation Center."

"Time and again," Adams wrote in his autobiography,

I would come to New York, excited with professional and social ambitions and promises, only to be physically frayed and spiritually disemboweled within a few weeks. In that penitentiary environment, most of the museums and galleries seem to exist in a kind of purgatory, either to accept the fluorescent heaven of a final resting place or the hell of obscurity. I have yet to understand the harmony of magnificent apartments, hideous ghettos, industrial deserts, furs, rags, Tiffany's and Joe's curio shop ...

John Szarkowski, a veteran of thirty years at MOMA, is a connoisseur of that tricky harmony. He is an urbanite, a member of the tribe that had the most difficulty understanding Adams. Szarkowski's curatorial bent is toward photography with social significance. He was an early champion of Diane Arbus—a woman who, both thematically and in her shaky darkroom skills, amounted to the anti-Adams. "Ansel Adams at 100," I hoped, would not be a case of the fox curating the chicken coop.

Shuffling forward in a queue toward the gallery entrance, reading Szarkowski's commentary in the museum handout, I felt the first tiny intimations of trouble ahead. "The peaks and ice fields and terrains of rubble ..." Szarkowski writes. "Terrains of rubble," for those of us who go bouldering there, are called taluses. Those white cirques under the peaks in Adams's photographs are not ice fields. The Sierra Nevada, the photographer's home range, has only a handful of tiny, remnant glaciers—nothing that could be called a field. "Ansel Adams at 100" includes photographs of glaciers on Mount Robson and McDonnell Peak, in Canada, but those are *hanging* glaciers, not ice fields. That whiteness you see, Mr. Szarkowski, is snow.

My peevishness startled me. I was finding fault with the exhibit before I got in the door. Curious about the source of my reaction, and reading further in the handout, I



"Ansel Adams at 100," Chicago Art Institute, 2002

rationalized myself like this: There is a language for terrain, just as there is a language for art. Szarkowski knows the latter but not the former. Ansel Adams's photography is about both.

The first room of the exhibit is dedicated almost entirely to contact prints—reproductions made without an enlarger—and to other small prints. Ansel Adams as miniaturist! His great retrospective of 1963, "The Eloquent Light," designed by Nancy Newhall, filled nine big rooms in San Francisco's De Young Museum with more than 500 images of varying sizes—the biggest show ever for a photographer. It opened with a bang: a stunning 4' x 5' print of *Monolith, the Face of Half Dome*. Szarkowski's exhibit opens with a bunch of little squeaks. Fumbling in my pocket, I brought out my reading glasses. I was not alone. Others were tipping chins up to peer at the photos through bifocals, and younger eyes were scrutinizing them from eight inches away. We looked like a convention of philatelists.

Szarkowski, explaining his choice of small prints, many of them made early in Adams's career, has said that he finds the prints of the older Adams overly dark and melodramatic. The curator, a man of seventy-five, believes that Adams after fifty was just a parody of himself. "Mostly the early print is closer to what the pictures persuade me he had in his head when he made them," Szarkowski told *The San Francisco Chronicle*. In other words, he knows what

Adams had in mind better than Adams himself did. Szarkowski's exhibit seeks to save the photographer from his own devices.

As I moved through the exhibit, squinting at the walls, I remembered Adams's pride in showing me the biggest of those devices. In 1964, when I was nineteen, I worked out of Adams's new house in Carmel Highlands, assembling an exhibit book about the Big Sur coast, with photographs by Adams and others. He gave me a tour of his new darkroom. In the middle, mounted on rails, was a huge enlarging camera for making mural-size prints. The thing had a bellows on it such as might have served Vulcan at his forge. The easel for holding the print paper was also mounted on rails, and illuminated by thirty-six powerful lamps. From an 8" x 10" negative this artillery could make a print as large as 40" x 78". Adams, standing beside the giant camera in his grizzled beard, wearing his camera vest of many pockets, looked like Hemingway with a new elephant gun.

John Szarkowski has no truck with this grandiose approach to photography. No mural-size melodrama in *his* exhibit. That giant camera on railroad tracks was, one imagines him thinking, just puerile, mine-is-bigger-than-yours exhibitionism.

One of Szarkowski's techniques is to juxtapose early prints he likes with later prints of the same image that he finds melodramatic, while offering little lessons on what



Mount McKinley and Wonder Lake: a 1949 print on the left, a 1978 print on the right

Adams did wrong. “The change imposed on *Mount McKinley and Wonder Lake* thirty years later is not easy to understand,” Szarkowski writes in the exhibit catalogue of one of these pairings. “Why this radiant peak, a reflection of our highest and purest aspirations, should have been transformed into a dirty snowdrift is a mystery to this viewer.”

But not a mystery to the viewers of Szarkowski’s exhibit, I discovered. As an experiment, I paused by this pair of McKinleys to watch. Viewers invariably passed the small 1949 print to linger by the 1978 version, which is larger and more dramatic. The public has always liked Ansel Adams, even if the critics have not. (This no doubt explains the sour opinion of many of the critics.) “Dirty snowdrift”? In his 1978 *McKinley*, Adams simply darkened the shadows on the peak, but not beyond the tonal range the eye accepts. I confess that the print is a little dark for my taste (I prefer intermediate prints I have seen of this image), but it is within the realm. These are McKinley shadows as one might perceive them at dawn from Wonder Lake. The 1978 print is not just more dramatic; it also conveys more information. Adams’s darkening of shadows accentuates the topography

of the mountain, sharpening the knife-edge ridges, bringing out the massif’s third dimension. Thanks to the heightened contrasts, Szarkowski’s “radiant peak” is in fact more radiant in the later version. The little print looks washed out, almost archival, beside the big one, which is unmistakably an Ansel Adams. (“Pablo Picasso at 120,” should such a show run concurrently, would be an odd retrospective indeed if it insisted on the primacy of the painter’s blue period—that early chapter of understated work—at the expense of all the pyrotechnics that came later.)

Mount McKinley may be allegorical, “a reflection of our highest and purest aspirations,” but it is also an actual mountain. Perhaps these California viewers were drawn to the 1978 print because they knew how big mountains look and how big mountains *feel*.

In Szarkowski’s catalogue commentary on *Lake and Cliffs*, *Sierra Nevada*, I found an echo of—or perhaps the inspiration for—Vicki Goldberg’s frightened reaction to that photograph. Szarkowski sees this Adams image as “one of his most radical and haunting pictures, and perhaps the coldest, most pessimistic landscape picture since Arnold

Böcklin's *Island of the Dead*—all ice and knife-sharp stone, rapping out a rhythm like the chattering of a windigo's teeth during the starvation moon." It is wonderful that Szarkowski was moved by the picture, but *pessimistic?* *Windigo's teeth? Starvation moon?* Has the curator, in his seventy-five years, never seen snow on the lakes of Central Park? A melodramatic old age is not a fate that Ansel Adams was destined to suffer alone.

Szarkowski's text in the exhibit catalogue perpetuates some myths. "It is unnecessary to pause further over Adams' commercial work," he writes, "except to note that it kept him alive and precariously solvent until he was seventy, at which late date he began to make a living income." This notion that Adams was a struggling artist until late in life is a persistent one. The legend would have it that Adams lived hand to mouth until he was rescued by the clever marketing scheme of his friend William Turnage. The truth is that Adams at sixty had a place in Yosemite Valley and a magnificent house on the Carmel coast. Over his massive fireplace in Carmel was a fifteenth-century Chinese drum six feet in diameter. The living room gave way to a long white gallery hung with his prints, at the far end of which was a concert piano. Adjoining the gallery was the state-of-the-art darkroom from which big prints were delivered fresh to the gallery walls. By 1964, when I roomed in the Carmel house, Adams was getting a yearly retainer of \$75,000 from Polaroid for just fooling around in his spare time with the company's cameras and film.

Sometimes Szarkowski is facile, as when he suggests that the darkening of prints in the latter part of Adams's career may reflect a darkening of the photographer's world view. (Yes, and the distortions of Picasso's cubist period may indicate some sort of galloping astigmatism.) Where the darkening of tones is a problem, really, is in Szarkowski's mini-biography of Adams, which is heavy on the melancholy, emphasizing self-doubt, frustration, and despair over fallow periods. Szarkowski conveys little sense of Adams's enormous capacity for play and merriment. The photographer's talent for fun was at least as large as his talent for art. The curator would have done better to follow his own advice and lighten up.

But sometimes Szarkowski is astute. More than once he caused me to reconsider my opinions of Adams, which are, as the reader may have noticed, a wee bit entrenched. One of his observations on *This Is the American Earth* brought me up short.

More than half of the book's photographs are by Adams, but work by twenty other contemporary photographers is included. Of the twenty, the large majority lived and worked west of the Missouri. Those who worked elsewhere were represented by photographs that illustrated ecological failure—Arthur Rothstein by an eroded, clear-cut field, Werner Bischoff by starvation in India, Cartier-Bresson by a photograph of a boy who appears to be

hiding in a mazelike urban street, with no blade of grass in sight. Intentionally or otherwise, the book projects a Calvinist insularity. It appears to see most of the world as beyond salvation, and the American West as the last chance for New Jerusalem.

I had never noticed this regional slant. Szarkowski's observation is not perfectly accurate—the book's most luminous symbol of hope, the backlit "tern in flight," is by a New Englander, Eliot Porter. Its most devastating image of environmental ruin, a double-spread aerial shot of the infinite sprawl of Los Angeles, is by a westerner, William Garnett. But in general Szarkowski is right. He opened my eyes to how Adams's biases might look from east of the Missouri.

Yet I wonder: How wrong is the book's vision, even as summarized by Szarkowski? Evidence mounts that most of the world may indeed be beyond salvation. The notion that the American West is the last chance for a New Jerusalem was not just an Ansel Adams conceit; it was a conviction that pervaded America for generations ("Go west, young man"). The conviction was still fresh for Adams's generation, born just a decade after the official closing of the frontier. And the fact is that most of America's unspoiled landscape and big scenery still reside out west.

As to that "Calvinist insularity," I would point out that Adams was not born with it. It was not he who fired the first shot across the Missouri. Adams went east, young man, full of ambition, only to find his western photographs rejected as idealized, overformal, inhuman, and socially irrelevant. Insularity cuts both ways—a fact that the critics and curators of the little island of Manhattan have always been slow to grasp.

Looking back to "The Eloquent Light," Szarkowski detects several agendas, one of which troubles him. The 1963 exhibit, he believes, was part of a campaign by Adams and Newhall "dedicated to the advancement of Adams' work and—more broadly and more problematically—to a narrowing view of photography's potential." Adams and Newhall were certainly vocal about what sorts of photography they liked and disliked. (Often what they disliked was the work displayed at New York's MOMA.) But aren't exhibits usually organized around some theory? Isn't a certain tendentiousness par for the course? Tendentiousness certainly animates Szarkowski's present exhibit.

In "The Eloquent Light," Adams and Newhall were indeed arguing for one school of photography over others, but why is that troublesome? Szarkowski seems to confuse Adams's job with his own. As the director emeritus of photography at MOMA, he has a mandate to explore photography's potential. Adams's mandate as a photographer was to follow his own vision. What should Adams have done in that 1963 retrospective in order to embrace photography's potential more enthusiastically? When you are working a vein as rich as

Adams's, is it really advisable to pull up stakes, flood your shafts, and go off prospecting for another lode?

But this notion of agenda is an interesting one, and it caused me to wonder about the agenda of "Ansel Adams at 100." Szarkowski has managed—I would not have thought it possible—to hang a dull Ansel Adams exhibit. His presentation is devoid of imagination. The pictures, all more or less the same small size, are posted evenly and at the same height. The show contains many wonderful images—the artist is, after all, Ansel Adams—but I have never before seen the photographer's work presented this way, with such a stubborn refusal to indulge any flair. In the exhibit "This Is the American Earth," Nancy Newhall varied image sizes dramatically, from what she called "little jewels" to prints several feet across. Here and there she arranged natural objects—seashells, stones, weathered deadwood from the timberline in the High Sierra. An argument might be made that this garnish was a distraction. Something can no doubt be said for austerity. But monotony is not the spice of life. Some images want to be miniatures; others cry out for size. Smaller pictures make us grateful for the big ones, and vice versa.

If, in "The Eloquent Light," Ansel Adams narrowed the view of photography's potential, then here Szarkowski has struck back. He has narrowed our view of Adams's potential. None of Adams's portraiture is included, because Szarkowski finds it "wooden." None of his commercial work is included, because it "seldom transcended technical competence," according to Szarkowski. ("His handling of human models was stiff and unpersuasive, even by the low standards of most advertising photography; his industrial illustration seldom gives any sense of work being done; in his reportage nothing of interest happens.") No images from the Manzanar series have made it into the show. None of the architectural studies from *Fiat Lux*, Adams's book on the Berkeley campus of the University of California, are included. (One architectural photo did pass muster. It came from east of the Missouri: *Broad Street, New York City*.) Few prints from Adams's maturity made the grade, except as foils for the early prints Szarkowski prefers.

Adams hailed John Szarkowski's replacement of Edward Steichen as MOMA's director of photography. When Szarkowski hung Ansel Adams's work at MOMA in 1979, he showed his predilection for small, early prints—a rediscovery that interested Adams and gratified him. But while Adams lived, the curator was never quite so frank in his opinion of the photographer as he is in the present exhibit. Adams would have been surprised, I think, by this centennial gloss on his life and oeuvre.

"Ansel Adams at 100" closes with a room in which Szarkowski has hung images by photographers he considers Adams's successors. The vapidness of Szarkowski's taste in nature photographs when he has no certified genius to glean from is dumbfounding. The vacancy of the room is

epitomized, for me, by a landscape by Robert Adams (no relation), an image so profoundly nondescript that this can only be its point—nondescriptness. It shows an unlovely ridge with a couple of scruffy bushes on it. I stood a long time before this cipher, as one might stand before Mona Lisa and her smile. It looked as if Robert Adams had forgotten that his camera was loaded and the thing accidentally went off. Trying to imagine what Szarkowski saw in this picture, I came up with a number of theories:

Perhaps the curator admires a sort of faux randomness in the picture, an artlessness, a snapshot quality, perceived as giving a truer picture of the world than the pretty one provided by the studied, selective compositions of Ansel Adams and his ilk.

Perhaps for Szarkowski, the city dweller, the picture provides reassurance that nature is really not all that interesting.

Perhaps Szarkowski finds self-justification in the photo: Anyone can understand the art of Ansel Adams, whose images just knock one over. What role does that leave the critic? It takes a rarefied sensibility to see anything important in photographs like this one by Robert Adams.

Backtracking through "Ansel Adams at 100," it struck me that I had seen better Adams exhibitions at home. In my mother's living room is an "Ansel wall" of original prints, gifts from the photographer: A good-size *Tenaya Lake, Yosemite*. A good-size *Aspens, New Mexico*. A smallish print of what is probably Adams's most famous mountaineering photograph, *David Brower and Morgan Harris, the Minarets*, which shows two climbers, their rope, and their crag in silhouette against bright Sierra clouds.

For many years the Ansel wall was dominated by a 4' x 5' exhibition print of *Aspens, New Mexico*, on loan from the photographer between shows. It was there so long that I began to hope that Adams had forgotten about it—but no such luck. Today the print would be worth more than the house. It was an image you could lose yourself in. No fear of that with the bonsai aspens of "Ansel Adams at 100." Adams's notions about the power in size, his ideas about the virtue of inviting viewers into big pictures, his fondness for that howitzer of an enlarging camera, was all just grandstanding, apparently, and holds no weight with John Szarkowski. Szarkowski's print of *Sierra Nevada From Lone Pine, California* is smaller than the double-spread plate of the same image that opens *This Is the American Earth*. If that book was a brave attempt to bottle an exhibit, then Szarkowski's exhibit wants to bottle the book. It seeks to decant the photographer into a vial. The aesthete from the East has come out west and cut Ansel Adams down to size. ■

"Ansel Adams at 100" will be in London from July 4 through September 22, in Berlin from October 10 through January 5, in Los Angeles from February 2 through April 27, and in New York from next July 9 through November 4.

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REPORT FROM JUNCTION

A short story

BY BRAD VICE

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Late in the afternoon Kurt Schaffer rides on his roan gelding up to his uncle Pleasant's feedstore, only to find that the old man has already left for the hospital in Johnson City, to visit his sick wife. Kurt doesn't much care for filling in at the feedstore. The public life of a merchant doesn't appeal to him. He prefers the solitary existence of working cattle on his father's ranch, or the excitement of playing football on the weekends. Working at the store means that he can become locked into pointless conversations; he's at the mercy of any son of a bitch with six bits for a bag of Ripsnorter sweetfeed.

The feedstore is only a mile or so away from the abandoned courthouse in Blanco. The county seat moved to Johnson City years ago. The year is 1954 and the Blanco River is dry. All of Texas is four years into a drought that has caused everything that was once green to turn brown, curl up, and blow away. The only vegetation that remains consists of a few mesquite trees, honey locust, and oceans of short cactus. Kurt will be a sophomore at Texas A&M before rain falls on his home again. That same year the Aggies will win their first Southwest Conference championship in fifteen years. But right now Kurt is beginning his last year of high school, and the Aggies are perennial losers. Even so, he has heard rumors that things are about to change for A&M. The newspaper reported last week that the new head coach, Paul "Bear" Bryant, is determined to institute an extreme brand of spartan military discipline.

Nine days ago Bryant drove his new team deep into the desert, to a place called Junction, where the team has been housed in abandoned military barracks. The players practice all day in a field of sand and clay drawn off in chalk lines, and they tackle one another atop jagged rocks and prickly pears. Denied water for hours at a time, the team continues to run and block and tackle no matter what. The boys carry on with sprained knees, dislocated shoulders, broken noses, broken ribs. According to the newspaper, hardly a man among them is still whole.

A syndicated columnist uses words like "bone-crushing" and "inhumane." He describes the players as "bloody" and "mangled" and compares them to soldiers on the Bataan Death March or to concentration-camp victims. Two days ago one of the players, Drake Goetze, a center from Paris, fell out with heatstroke and almost died of a heart attack. Pushed beyond their endurance, other members of the team have simply fled, sneaking out of the ovenlike Quonset huts in the middle of the night in order to hitchhike away. Every day the reporter gives an update on the gruesome situation and publishes a list of names—the quitters. Originally a hundred and eleven players, the team has been reduced to around forty, and still the practice continues. Kurt vows to himself that next year, when his time comes to ride out into the desert, his name will not be printed in such a list. By the time he finishes next year's training camp under this new slave-driving coach, his daddy's ranch will have gone under, and maybe his uncle's feedstore, too. His aunt April will probably be dead, and his family may well have moved away from their home in Blanco County forever. At any rate Kurt will not quit, because he will have nothing to go back to.

T-Willy, Uncle Pleas's World War I buddy, walks out from the shadowy doorway onto the porch of the feedstore as Kurt ties his horse to one of the support beams. "Kurt, where in the heck have you been? Pleas was expecting you an hour ago."

Kurt isn't in the mood to be talked down to, especially by the likes of T-Willy. Kurt has spent the entire morning riding fence, and he's tired and disgusted. He goes about the business of unsaddling the roan without so much as a hello. Kurt needs help, but he won't ask for it. The horse stepped on his left hand a few days ago, and the last three fingers are broken and taped together, the nails black and split. Kurt has always been a little suspicious of T-Willy, partly because the old man's a half-breed: part German, part Mexican. But mostly Kurt dislikes T-Willy because

he's never seen the old man do a hard day's work. He just sits here in the feedstore with the fans on him, drinking whiskey, smoking cigarettes, and playing checkers with Pleas, living off the skinny tit of a soldier's pension. Instead of asking for the old man's aid, Kurt grips the saddle horn tightly with his thumb and forefinger and manages to drag the saddle down off the horse's back without dropping it.

"You know I'm too down in my back to load up anybody's truck. I don't even know how to open up that cash register in there."

"Everybody pays with credit anyway," Kurt says. "Has anybody been in today?"

"Not since Pleas left."

"Well, then, it hasn't been a problem, now has it?"

"You worried Pleas. That's the damn problem. He doesn't need any more of that."

Kurt lays the saddle on the railing of the porch and then drapes a froth-soaked blanket matted with horsehair next to it. A saddle-shaped sweat outline on the gelding's back is already beginning to evaporate in the sun. Next Kurt takes his father's .45 caliber cavalry revolver out of his jeans and places it in the saddlebag in exchange for a pick, which he will use to clean the rocks and dung out of the horse's hooves. Every morning for the past two years Kurt has risen well before sunrise, put on his work clothes and a baseball cap, saddled up the roan, and ridden five or ten miles around the perimeter of his daddy's property. He carries the .45 in order to put water-starved cattle out of their misery. He has killed dozens since the beginning of the long, cruel summer—so many that he has begun to think of himself as the ranch's executioner, a kind of resident Angel of Death bringing peace to all the wretched animals the land will not support. And the job is getting to him.

Last week was the worst. Riding across the northeast corner of the ranch, Kurt spotted a pack of turkey buzzards wheeling in the cloudless morning light. He figured they were circling more dead cattle. But as he came closer, he could see that the head of one of his daddy's prostrate Herefords was still moving; the animal was beating itself senseless in the dust. Kurt kicked the gelding and charged up to a gruesome sight: unwilling to wait for death, the buzzards had just picked out the Hereford's eyes. Two or three of the birds bobbed with the strewn sticky nerves; the others tapped their beaks into the hollow sockets of the Hereford's skull. Kurt unloaded the pistol, killing one buzzard on the ground and two others in midair before the reports chased the rest out of range.

"Take off, you sons a bitches!" Kurt screamed, pointing the empty gun up in the air. Then he got off the horse and looked down at the savaged remains of the cow. It was all he could do to keep from vomiting. The cow stared blindly at him out of one of the upturned holes in her skull. The other side of her face she rubbed violently on the ground, her black tongue caking with dust. Kurt cursed himself for

continuing to shoot after the buzzards were out of range. He had to reload in order to put the tortured Hereford out of her misery.

Nervous, the horse turned its hindquarters away from Kurt as he snatched up the reins. Kurt stuck the gun in his jeans so that he could fiddle around in the saddlebag while the horse's backside continued to drift away from him. Kurt jerked down hard on the reins to stop the horse from moving; the bit clenched against the roan's jaw, scaring him still. The horse laid his ears flat back on his head and shivered. It seemed to take forever for Kurt to find the box of shells. When he finally did, he let go of the reins, drew the gun, and fumbled with the pin that released the revolver's chamber. He dropped both the gun and the box of shells, and the bullets spilled out on the ground. Kurt fell to his knees and lurched for the revolver with his right hand. The ammunition rolled between the fetlocks of the roan. Without thinking, Kurt extended his hand, and the nervous roan stepped backward in retreat. The horse's front hoof landed squarely on Kurt's fingers. For a hellish moment the hand was simply stuck under the horse, and there was nothing Kurt could do to move it. The horse could have easily reared up and trampled him to death or turned and kicked Kurt in the head with one of his powerful back legs. All Kurt could do was stare at his crushed hand pinned to the ground, and think to himself, *Oh, my God. She is still alive. She is still alive.*

Kurt replays the bloody scene with the buzzards over and over in his brain as he lifts up one leg of the roan and scrapes debris out of the V-shaped groove in its hoof.

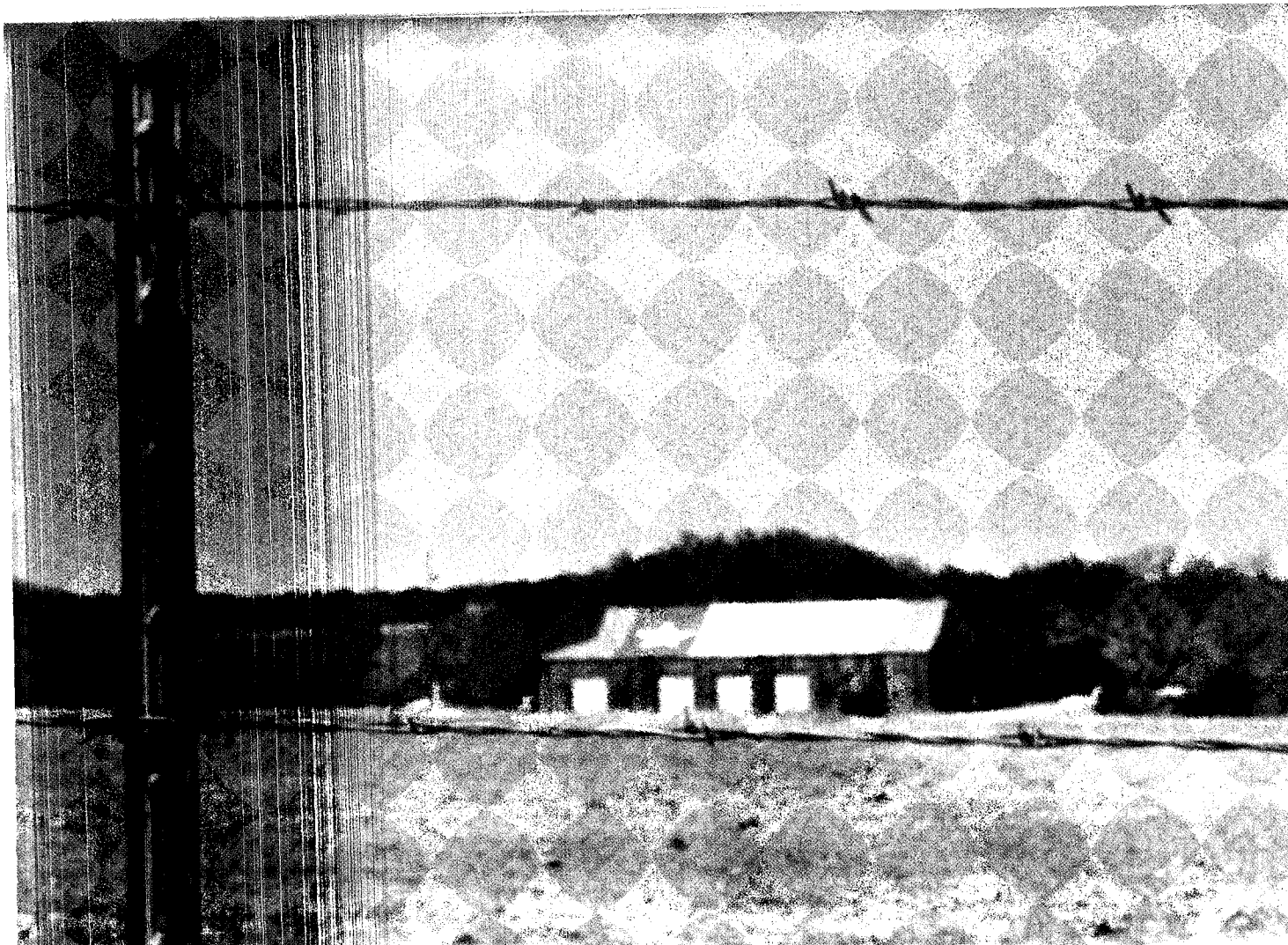
"Goddamn," T-Willy says, trying to start up the conversation again. "I do believe this drought is rougher than the one in the thirties. If it don't rain soon, every rancher from Austin to New Mexico will be broke."

"You reckon?" Kurt asks, rolling his eyes. Now that he is here to keep an eye on the store, he wishes the old man would go away. Kurt knows as well as anyone what's going to happen to the ranchers from Austin to New Mexico. It will only be a matter of months before his own daddy goes under, and when enough people like Kurt's daddy go broke, his uncle's feedstore will go broke, and the banks will take everything.

The day Kurt shot the Hereford, he returned home from his morning ride to eat breakfast. Instead of eating, he poured himself a cup of coffee and went outside on the front porch to drink it. His father rose from the kitchen table, where he had been picking at a mixture of eggs and hog brains, and followed. Kurt had already wrapped his fingers in a blue bandana.

"What happened to your hand, boy?"

Kurt hesitated only a moment before he told his father the story of the buzzards' monstrous attack. He almost cried when he came to the part about having to wait on the roan to release his hand. "It was stupid. Plain old stupid."



"I want you to know something. From now on, I'm selling everything but the goats." Kurt's father seized his shoulder so hard that the boy almost dropped his coffee cup. "You're old enough to be on your own now, Kurt. Don't screw up your scholarship, son, because from here on out you're going to have to be responsible for yourself." His father lowered his gaze. "I'm sorry, I had to say that."

Kurt keeps his back to T-Willy as he grooms the gelding. He doesn't need a shiftless old man to tell him about hard times. "Why don't you try giving your mouth a rest for a little while," he says.

"Kurt, I'll swan," T-Willy says, scratching his curly gray head in wonder. "You are the aggravatinnest thing I ever run across." He sits down in a rocking chair. "I hope somebody pops that fresh mouth of yours for you when you go off to school next year." The old man starts rolling a cigarette. It's not a pretty sight. First he takes his teeth out and sets them in his lap. After he has rolled up the tobacco, his wormy tongue peeks out of its toothless cave to seal the paper.

Kurt hates the idea of getting old. He runs his left hand up the buttons of his chambray work shirt and scratches his stomach, which is flat and hard, though a little black pit of

tear rests under the muscles. His only physical imperfection is a scar under his left eye, a white star puncture wound, a memento from Kurt's childhood when he fell off a Shetland pony and landed facefirst onto a barbed wire fence. His coordination is better now; he has power and agility.

Kurt is tough and mean, but a bit of a runt. Because he works so hard on the ranch, he can't keep weight on. At 165 pounds, he is really too light to play college ball; A&M was one of the few major universities that offered him a scholarship. Jess Neely, at Rice, made him an offer, but the ties and jackets that Rice students have to wear to class are expensive. A military institute, Texas A&M provides uniforms. But if the news reports from Junction are true, Kurt will most likely get bounced around pretty good when his turn comes to practice in the desert, and he wonders if he has made the wrong decision. He will never have the luxury of backing down from a fight, or even the chance to rise casually from a pile-up. He must never allow himself to dog it, not even a little, when running the gassers or playing bull-in-the-ring. Kurt must positively shine with hustle and aggression if he hopes to win a position; otherwise, he will find himself riding the pine in the fall, and will maybe lose the chance to renew the scholarship.

"You have to act like a banty rooster." This is what his father, who is fond of cockfighting and boxing metaphors,

tells him. "Half the size but twice as mean. That's you, Kurt." Sometimes before a tough game Kurt likes to hop himself up on white cross and bennies, cheap trucker speed that

THE BLIZZARD

You'll never take off your blue cashmere
for me, your jade belt, or even your white
walking shoes that squeak like a nurse's.
Who are you with now, taking his pulse?
Why am I just well enough not to warrant
your care? Those snow-white stockings
will never drift on my floor like waterlilies.
I will row the boat of my sleek, narrow bed
to the center of the lake and bask in the sun,
opening my basket of strawberries, a buttery
cheese, and a musky bottle of Spanish wine,
and very gently, carefully get drunk alone.

I've had the sun's pleasures, but you are the snow
I've never known. I can only imagine the falling
crystals on my tongue, each one the moist word
of a poem in a language I barely know, *fleurs*,
chaleurs, *douleurs* ... the blizzard of your body.
I think of Ötzi, the Ice Man, 5,000 years ago
in the southern Alps, herding his sheep home.
He was prepared for anything: a quiver of cherry
and dogwood arrows, a longbow of yew, an ax
of burnished copper, mushrooms and einkorn
in a leather pouch, stripes and a cross of blue-
black soot tattooed on his ankles and back.
When the snow came, he didn't have a chance.

An unusually warm summer, tourists on a picnic,
salami and orange soda in their packs. They saw
the back of his skull jut from the thawing snow
and made a call from their cell phone, talking
excitedly in a language that meant nothing
to Ötzi: strange vowels, inhuman consonants.
I think if you gave yourself to me for just one
afternoon, sunlight lapping at the lace curtains,
I would be lost in a livid white storm within four
howling walls. My extremities would start to go
numb, sensation shrink to an azure flame, my lips
just starting to form the first words of your language.

—ROBERT THOMAS

*Robert Thomas is the author of the forthcoming
Door to Door, which won the 2001 Poets Out Loud prize.*

makes his brain itch and his teeth ache, but the pills keep
him immune to fatigue or pain. Now he is so tired from
working on the ranch that he wishes he had something
with a little pep to keep him going. Then Kurt remembers
that T-Willy usually carries more-soothing medicine.

"T-Willy, you got your bottle on you?"

T-Willy looks sideways, like he's thinking about holding
a grudge, but then he grins, reaches into his overalls, and
hands the kid the bottle. "Take it easy on that stuff."

Kurt takes a mighty swig from the bottle. It doesn't
taste like whiskey—more like sweet wine—but it's still
hot and strong like liquor. "Damn, what is this?" he says.

"They call it peach beer. It's brandy made with peach
peels. My cousin sent it to me from Georgia. Ain't it smooth?"

Kurt grunts and takes another slug.

"Here, you best hand that back. Here comes your uncle.
He'll have my hide if he knows I'm getting you drunk."

Kurt hands the bottle back as he spies a green Ford
speeding toward the feedstore from Johnson City. But it's
going much too fast to be Kurt's uncle, a cautious driver
who rarely gets above 50 mph. As the truck comes closer
to the store, Kurt can see that it is similar to his uncle's
but much newer; even through all the dust the chrome
trim glimmers. T-Willy finishes his cigarette and replaces
his teeth.

The truck pulls into the drive, runs right up next to
the roan, and parks. Right off Kurt is sore with the driver,
who doesn't think enough of his horse to park a few yards
away. If the roan weren't gelded, it might have gotten ner-
vous and reared up and possibly fallen over and hurt itself.
More likely, it would have kicked the shit out of the shiny
new truck and split a hoof. But the roan is tired too, so it
simply pulls back on its halter and gives a shivering nicker.
Kurt doesn't recognize the driver, which means he must
be from pretty far off. When he steps out, Kurt sees that
he's a big man, well over six feet tall and thick in the mid-
dle. He has a red moustache, and he's wearing an expen-
sive Stetson, and a denim work shirt that is altogether too
clean. A little blonde girl in pigtails, no more than seven
and wearing brown overalls, jumps out of the passenger
seat. The wind shifts, and even before the stranger has
slammed the door of his truck, Kurt can smell that they
have brought something with them, something that has
been in the sun too long.

T-Willy, delighted to see the little girl, hunkers down
in his chair and says, "Hey there, cowgirl, who you got
there with you?"

"My daddy," she says, with an adult seriousness. Then
she moves behind her father, so that she is difficult to see.

The man with the red moustache gives T-Willy an apolo-
getic look and then turns to Kurt. "Pleas ain't here, is he?"

"Nope." Kurt shakes his head. "He's in Johnson City."

The stranger looks disappointed. "Would you mind
coming over here and looking at something for me?"

Kurt and T-Willy exchange looks; then Kurt nods and walks to the back of the truck. The man lowers the tailgate, frowning. On top of a bed of canvas fertilizer sacks lies a newborn Red Angus bull, no more than a day or two old, and by the looks of it, the calf has spent a considerable amount of that time suffering out in the heat. It hasn't been licked clean. Dried afterbirth has crusted around its eyes and nostrils; its hide is matted with dried blood. Its nose is dull and pink. Already flies are gathering around the calf, lighting near its eyes and in the folds of its nostrils and on the umbilical cord. It is so tiny that it looks more like an orphaned fawn than a calf. The bull breathes slowly, dehydrated, too weak to even lift its head.

The little girl climbs on top of the back wheel and stands on tiptoes so that she can peer over into the bed and get a closer look. She smiles at Kurt. "His name is Chester."

The father turns to Kurt. "I can't figure why his momma don't want him. I guess it just happens that way sometimes."

"Lack of water," T-Willy offers. "It does things to their head. Makes cows plumb crazy. Or it might have been her first one and she didn't know what to do with it. That happens too."

"Look, my cousin's the cattleman, but he left town this morning. I just found this little fellow laying out near some brush not far from the house. I don't really know what to do with him. Somebody told me you can buy powdered milk here. Is that true?"

Kurt nods and walks up onto the porch and through the dark doorway of the store. He is almost bowled over by the rich smell of corn, oats, and molasses. He moves past stacks of crushed hay and cracked-corn feed, past the protein pellets and a pyramid of red salt blocks, all the way to the back of the store, where a few fifty-pound bags of powdered milk are stacked atop one another. Kurt selects one marked "Milk Starter"; it contains colostrum, the first milk a cow gives after birth, a thin, yellowish fluid full of minerals. Other bags are marked "Milk Replacer"—the hindmilk, the white milk.

Both the milk starter and the milk replacer are old. Since the drought most people don't bother trying to save an individual calf. Kurt shoulders the sack of colostrum and grabs a liter milk bottle off the shelf. The milk bottle is equipped with a long, vulgar-looking three-inch nipple that resembles a little boy's penis, pink and stiff. While Kurt is working in the back, he can barely make out the conversation T-Willy is having with the little girl's father. The man's name is something or other Dougan or Cougan, and he is an oilman, an executive, from Houston. But his relations live here in Blanco County. Walking back toward the doorway Kurt clearly hears the oilman say, "My cousin Bill wants me to buy in on his ranch, so I came to check the place out."

Kurt finds himself wishing that his father had some rich relatives, but his relatives are no different from himself, third- or fourth-generation Krauts, here from the time when Texas was still a part of Mexico.

Before Kurt can get back outside, T-Willy starts running his mouth about Aunt April, gossiping about her diabetic stroke, her blindness, how in all likelihood the doctors will have to amputate her legs, things he shouldn't speak about with strangers—with anyone. When Kurt gets out the door, he interrupts the conversation. "Here you go," he says, throwing the powdered milk onto the tailgate and setting the milk bottle on top of it.

"Mr. Cougan here is thinking about buying into Bill Worley's operation," T-Willy says. "They're cousins."

"Is that so?" Kurt says, not really asking. "You want me to show you how this works?"

"I'd appreciate that," Cougan tips his hat, cowboy style.

The little girl, still standing on the Ford's back tire, starts bouncing up and down, rocking the bed of the truck. She's so excited that Kurt can't help smirking. The poor girl must have lived all her life in the city.

Kurt pulls the drawstring on the powdered-milk sack and then steps up into the truck, seizes the tiny bull by the ears, and drags him to the tailgate. Cougan's daughter jumps off her tire and runs to the back of the truck so that she can watch what is about to take place. Kurt unscrews the nipple on the giant baby bottle and scoops about a cup of formula into the thick glass.

"What happened to your fingers?" Cougan's daughter is staring at the mess attached to his left hand.

"Damn, Katharine, that ain't polite."

For the first time all day Kurt laughs. "That's okay. She's just curious." But Kurt is unwilling to tell the real story behind his broken fingers, so he says, "Playing football."

"Football?" Cougan's eyes brighten. "You Kurt Schaffer?"

Kurt nods.

"You gonna be a redshirt Aggie next year?"

"Yep."

"Shoot, boy, I hope you're ready for one tough season. I hear that Bryant fellow works his players into the ground. He did it at Kentucky, too. That's why the Aggies got him. But from the way people talk, shit, he'll be lucky if he don't end up killing somebody. I read in the newspaper he's run off all but thirty-six men. You know, that boy from Paris is still in the hospital. If Bryant don't take those boys home soon, he won't have enough players left to field a team."

"Can we feed Chester now?" Katharine asks, impatient.

Kurt hands the milk bottle with the yellow powder in it to Katharine. "There's a bathroom inside the store. Go past the cash register, past the horse tack and harness, and turn right. Can you fill this up with hot water for me?"

Katharine says she can.

"Run the tap till it gets real hot, okay?" Kurt turns to Cougan. "Do you still have that newspaper on you?"

Cougan retrieves the local paper from the truck cab and hands it to Kurt. Kurt turns to the sports section and scans the headlines until he finds "REPORT FROM JUNCTION," by Allen Wier. The article recounts yet another hellish practice, a day full of blood and sand. At one point Wier describes a confrontation between Bryant and the father of Drake Goetze, the heatstroke victim from Paris. Goetze's parents had come to collect their son from the Junction infirmary. Because of his weak heart, they have demanded that Goetze never play another down of football. The article ends with a brief interview with the coach, in which Bryant's only comment on the matter is "If a boy is a quitter, I want to find out about it now, not in the fourth quarter." Then comes the list of four new names. Goetze's is among them, and this makes Kurt angry. If the boy had died on the practice field, would the papers have called him a quitter then, too? Kurt lowers the paper and looks at the bloody, flop-eared calf shivering in the sun, drawing flies.

He picks up the long pink nipple and pinches the tip. A tiny hole opens up through the thick rubber. "Those bastards at whatever factory makes these things should be shot. You leave it like this and the poor calf just winds up sucking air. Hey, T-Willy, you got your pocket knife on you?"

**FOR MY DOG,
WHO LISTENS TO ALL MY POEMS**

How entranced, each time, she sits there,
her eyes, I swear,
filling with tears
at her master's

inimitable brilliance. It's
clear to me what's
bounding through her
head: *The greatest,*

yet, of all the generations!
My husband says
she's just waiting
for her rations.

—CATHY SMITH BOWERS

*Cathy Smith Bowers is the author of The Love That
Ended in Texas (1992) and Traveling in Time of Danger (1990).*

"Uh-huh."

"Toss it here."

Kurt catches the knife with his right hand and flicks open the blade. Cougan watches him curiously as Kurt slashes a little X into the top of the nipple and then inserts the tip of the blade into the tiny hole, coring it out. When Katharine returns, Kurt takes the bottle away from her, caps it, and shakes vigorously. Sitting down next to the calf, he grabs it by the neck and allows some of the colostrum to dribble onto the calf's tongue. Blackish placenta smears across the young man's shirt as he slips the nipple into the calf's mouth. The calf gags and regurgitates the milk into Kurt's lap. Soaked, Kurt smells like a mixture of chalk and eggs. He curses.

"You think he's too far gone?" Cougan asks.

"Nope. He just don't know how to suck yet. He'll get a taste for it in a second."

Kurt dribbles more of the milk into the calf's mouth. Instead of trying to make the calf nurse the bottle, he massages its throat, forcing it to swallow. He does this three times, and after the third attempt the calf gives a guttural cough as the milk slides down. Kurt puts the little bull in a headlock in order to keep its head elevated, and this time the calf offers a blind attack on the nipple, eventually sucking the milk.

When Kurt was a kid, before powdered milk and baby bottles were made for livestock, if a momma cow ever abandoned her calf, Kurt's grandfather would milk another cow, mix that milk with a raw egg, and use a kitchen funnel to pour the enriched liquid into a drenching bottle. A drenching bottle looked like a wine bottle but had a much longer neck. The old man would have Kurt tie a rope around the calf's neck and throw it over a rafter in order to elevate the calf's head. Then Kurt's grandfather would stick the long glass neck of the drenching bottle into the calf's mouth and down its throat, forcing it to swallow the thick milk.

It makes Kurt feel good to think about the days when his grandfather was still around, and everything was glistening and green as far as the eye could see. Kurt hugs the nursing calf in the headlock for quite a while. The little bull rubs its body up against the boy as he daydreams. Eventually the calf finds strength enough to bob its head a little, as if it were punching its mother's udder.

Kurt grins and pulls the bottle away. Katharine looks on in amazement. "Can I feed him?" she asks.

"Sure." Kurt nods, and asks her father to put her up on the tailgate. Kurt hands her the bottle. She stands on the tailgate, holding the bottle outward. Milk drips near her feet as Kurt picks up the calf and holds its face to the streaming nipple. Kurt starts to tell the little girl to tilt the bottle up high, so that the calf won't have any problem swallowing. Then he feels something move through the fingers on his good hand. He looks down to find several translucent

worms, less than a quarter of an inch long, working their way through the caked-up corner of the calf's right eye. Kurt pulls the calf away from the nipple, flips it on its side, and brushes its eyes clean just in time to spot more maggots boiling up from the pink sores behind the eyelashes.

"Oh, hell."

"What's the matter?" Cougan asks.

"Man, your bull here's got the screwworms." Even when things were green, screwworms had been a problem for newborns. Screwworms are the larvae of blue-bellied blowflies, which lay their eggs in the wounded flesh of living animals. Kurt knows that some of the worms have probably already burrowed deep into the calf's body, and soon they will screw themselves into its vital organs and suck the life right out of it. In fact, with worms already on the calf's head, the maggots will most likely screw themselves into its brain and drive it completely mad before they exit back through its eyes. Kurt has never seen flies blow into the eyes before, although he has heard that they can blow inside the nose. Usually the flies lay their eggs in the navel of a newborn. This can be easily treated, by mixing kerosene and lard into a balm and applying it to the stomach. The kerosene kills the worms while the lard holds the chemical solution in place. But Kurt quickly realizes that putting kerosene on the sores around the calf's eyes will blind it.

"Look, uh, Mr. Cougan." Kurt weighs his words carefully, not wanting to upset the little girl. "You best leave Chester here with me. It'll probably be better if I take care of him myself."

"But, Daddy, you promised—you promised I could take care of him," the girl begs. "We need to take Chester back to Uncle Bill's with us. Please."

Cougan's eyes dart back and forth between Kurt and his daughter. "Actually, son, she's right. It ain't my calf to leave. It's my cousin's. He'll know what to do with him."

T-Willy attempts to intercede in Kurt's behalf. "I don't think you understand what the boy here is saying. That calf is in a lot of pain. It ain't going to get much better."

Cougan's eyes are fixed on Katharine, who is on the verge of tears.

Kurt lays the calf's head down on the tailgate to rest. "I'm telling you he's done for," he says. "There ain't no sense in dragging it out."

That does it. Katharine's face goes down into her hands, and she sobs.

Cougan puts his arm around her and cuts Kurt an evil look. "Well, son, why don't you let me be the judge of that." Then he whispers down to his daughter, "It's all right, honey. We'll take Chester home to Uncle Bill." Cougan cuddles the little girl, gently pressing her face into the swell of his broad stomach.

Kurt glances at the calf. The poor creature is shaking in pain, unable even to lick the yellow regurgitated milk off its nose. Kurt turns back to the rich oilman and his weeping

daughter, her tears the only stain on his crisp, clean shirt. "Why, you silly son of a bitch."

Katharine stops crying. T-Willy winces. Cougan's expression of paternal sympathy shatters. "Katharine, get in the truck," he says. She knows better than to argue. She slowly climbs down off the tailgate and lets herself into the Ford. Cougan waits until she has closed the door. "Now, why don't you get off my truck, you little shit."

Kurt knows that as soon as he steps off the tailgate the oilman will swing at him. So he moves back and bounds in an athletic flash over the right side of the truck, hoping the roan won't decide to kick him as he flies through the air. The horse nickers and pulls back against its halter, as it did when Cougan drove up.

Already Cougan is stalking around the opposite side of the truck, fists balled for action. "Look, son, I'm going to show you not to cuss me in front of my girl." T-Willy puts a hand on Cougan's shoulders in an effort to calm him, but Cougan bats it down, knocking the thin old man to the ground. This gives Kurt just the time he needs to make it to the saddlebag and draw the .45. Cougan's eyes go flat with fear and hate as the boy turns the gun on him. For just a moment Kurt prays that the man will keep coming. He would love to shoot Cougan in his fat gut, watch all that good food and smugness spill onto the dirt. How much different could it be from easing the dumb suffering of a steer mad for water or a fevered calf with worms itching through its brain? He has done it dozens of times—the quick flick of the hammer, and then the mark of the dime-size hole, and then a little peace for everyone. All the past there ever was, all the future there is ever going to be, meet at this place and fold into a single moment—the pulling of the trigger. Kurt is exhilarated by the fact that he suddenly has the power to change his life, and he keeps the gun leveled as he tries to figure out if he should.

Jail, Kurt thinks, might even be a relief: no hellish football camps out in the desert, no land auctions to witness. No winners, no losers, just a small, dark cell with plenty of cool water to drink. But then Kurt's mind turns back to the ugly turkey buzzards blinding the Hereford, picking and picking their way through life. The murderous moment slips away from him.

Apparently Cougan has also surmised that Kurt isn't going to shoot him. He continues to advance. Cougan's face is puffy and red with hate, and Kurt wonders if he will still go to jail if he doesn't shoot but the oilman dies of a heart attack. Kurt decides to bluff. He cocks the hammer and yells something he heard in a roadhouse once, when one of his friends wanted to scare a big Yankee from Cleveland out of a fight. "Mr. Cougan, I'm just a little old country boy. But I'll clue you, I'm mean as hell." As soon as the words leave his mouth they seem stupid and frail, the threat of a hick, and Cougan is coming on as if he has heard nothing at all.

Kurt can think of only one thing to do. He swings the gun away from Cougan and points it toward the child in the truck.

"No!" Cougan cries. He stops long enough to look at his

A WEEK LATER

A week later, I said to a friend: I don't think I could ever write about it. Maybe in a year I could write something. There is something in me maybe someday to be written; now it is folded, and folded, and folded, like a note in school. And in my dream someone was playing jacks, and in the air there was a huge, thrown, tilted jack on fire. And when I woke up, I found myself counting the days since I had last seen my husband—only two years, and some weeks, and hours. We had signed the papers and come down to the ground floor of the Chrysler Building, the intact beauty of its lobby around us like a king's tomb, on the ceiling the little painted plane, in the mural, flying. And it entered my strictured heart, this morning, slightly, shyly as if warily, untamed, a greater sense of the sweetness and plenty of his ongoing life, unknown to me, unseen by me, unheard, untouched—but known, seen, heard, touched. And it came to me, for moments at a time, moment after moment, to be glad for him that he is with the one he feels was meant for him. And I thought of my mother, minutes from her death, eighty-five years from her birth, the almost warbler bones of her shoulder under my hand, the eggshell skull, as she lay in some peace in the clean sheets, and I could tell her the best of my poor, partial love, I could sing her out with it, I saw the luck and luxury of that hour.

—SHARON OLDS

Sharon Olds's seventh book, The Unswept Room, will be published in October.

daughter. Katharine's face is pressed in horror against the window of the Ford. She doesn't have sense enough to duck under the dash. Instead she screams, "Daddy, Daddy!"

"No, please." The sight of his frightened daughter takes all the fight out of Cougan. He backs down, slides his body along the hood of the truck, and slowly makes a retreat to the other side. Kurt follows him halfway, keeping the gun pointed at the little girl until he backs up the porch steps. T-Willy has managed to get inside the feedstore and is peering out the dark window.

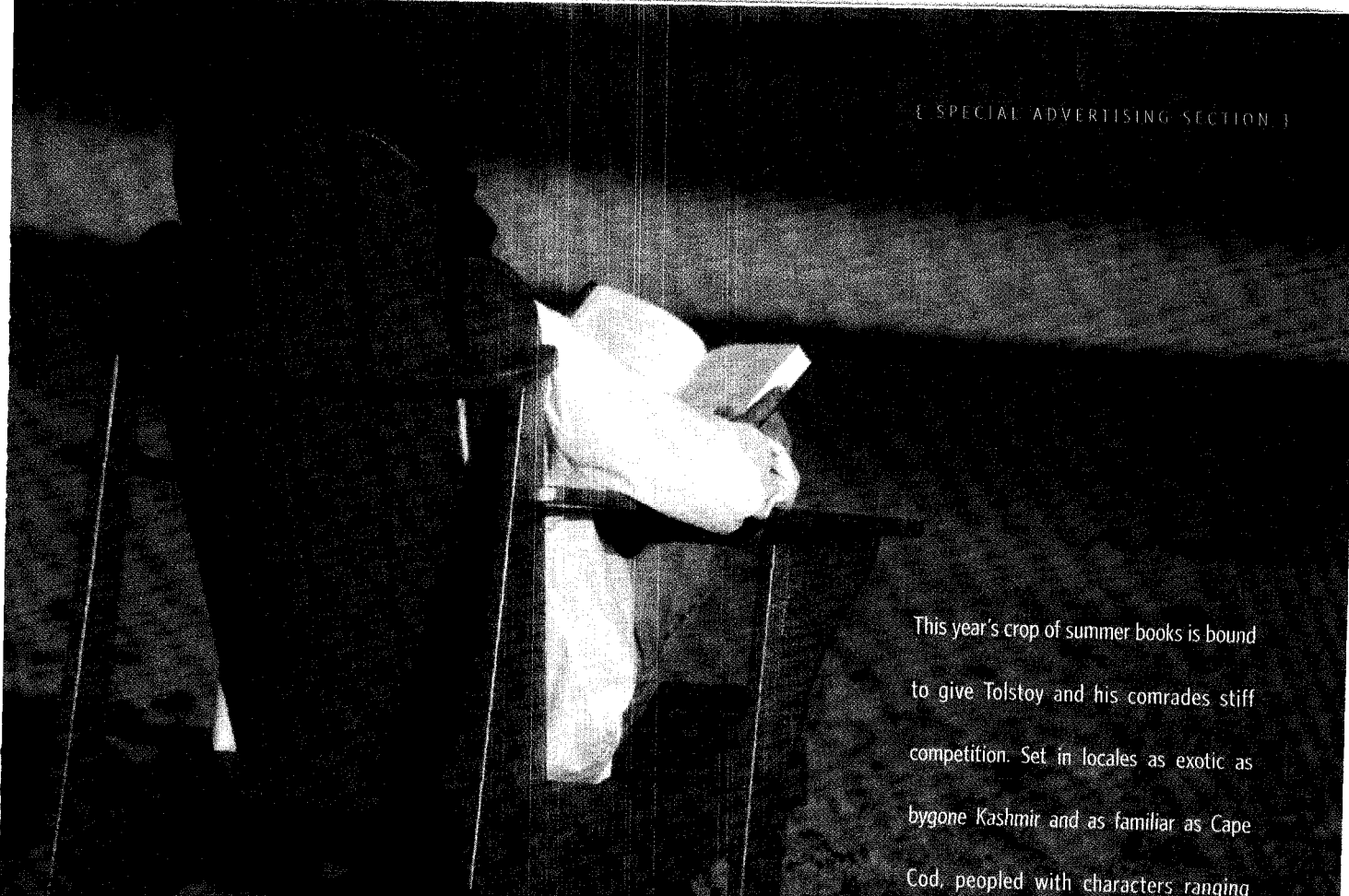
Cougan opens the door of the Ford. "This ain't over," he says. "I'll kill you for this." Kurt points the gun back toward the oilman and keeps it on him in case he has a pistol of his own under the seat of the truck or in the glove compartment. But Kurt is pretty sure that Cougan won't risk any shooting with his daughter next to him in the cab. Cougan pushes his little girl down in her seat and peels out in reverse, his ruddy face receding into a cloud of dust. But he floods the engine, and the truck stalls. Kurt raises the .45 again.

After two or three tries Cougan manages to turn the engine over. He shifts into first and floors the accelerator. The Ford lurches forward, violently flinging the little bull off the tailgate and onto the ground. The bottle shatters. The calf is too weak to cry out and lands in the dirt with a thud, as if it were already dead. When he sees this, rage wells up in Kurt all over again, and he is tempted to try to shoot out the truck's tires. But a little voice inside his head tells him to leave well enough alone. T-Willy comes back on to the porch, and they watch together as the green Ford disappears, a line of powdered milk running all the way to the highway.

"Kurt, I'm afraid you're out of your damn mind," T-Willy says, as he shrugs at Kurt and starts walking toward the calf. It lies lifeless, like a blown-out tire next to the road.

"You reckon?" Kurt asks, swinging the cocked gun in the direction of the old man. T-Willy puts up his hands. They stay that way for a second or two, and then Kurt unloads four rounds, not into the old man but into the calf—two in the belly, two in the skull. As he lowers the gun, Kurt feels a wave of regret wash over him. He is sorry that he pointed the gun at his uncle's friend, and thinking about pointing the gun at the little girl makes him feel sick at his cowardice. He even feels sorry he had to kill the calf with the screwworms twisting in its eyes, but mostly Kurt feels sorry for himself, because he knows that for all his trouble, his life hasn't changed a bit, and in the morning he will have to get up out of bed and put on his work clothes and saddle the roan, and the whole thing will start over again. ■

Brad Vice is an assistant professor of English at Mississippi State University. His fiction has been published in the Southern Review and the Georgia Review, and anthologized in New Stories From the South, 1997 and the forthcoming edition of Best New American Voices. He is at work on a collection of stories tentatively titled The Bear Bryant Funeral Train.



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BOOKS FOR SUMMER

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—David Stuart,
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The Plants That Shaped Our Gardens

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—Alain de Botton, *The Art of Travel*

The Art of Travel

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CAROLINE KENNEDY, Editor

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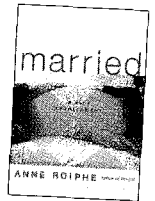
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—Alice Waters,
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Chez Panisse Fruit

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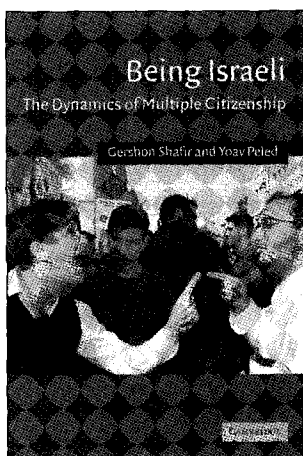
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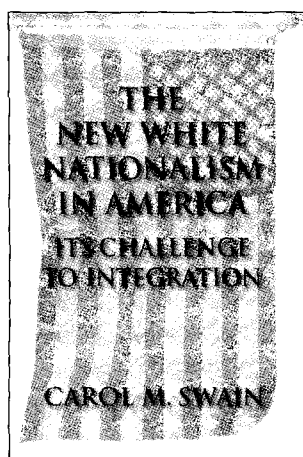
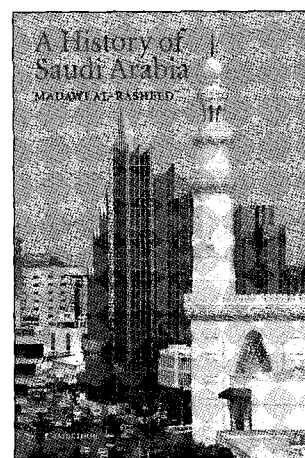
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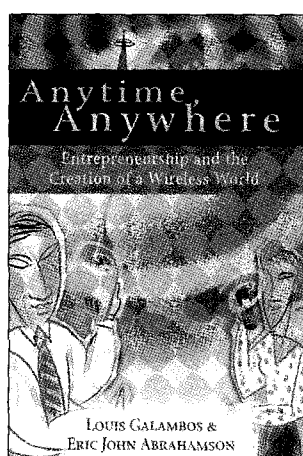
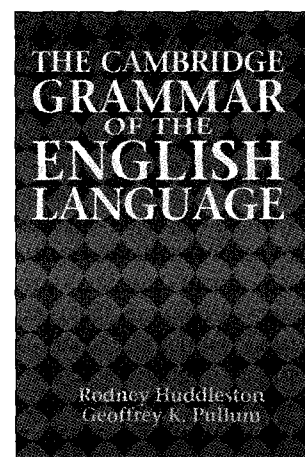
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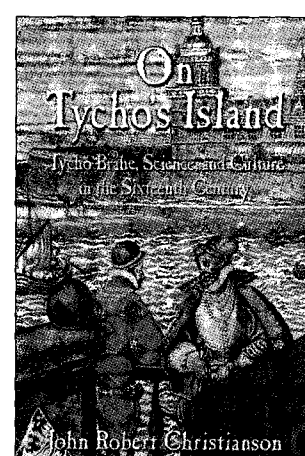
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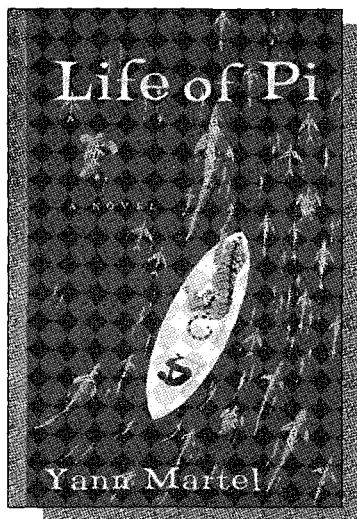


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BIOGRAPHY/MEMOIR

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—Strobe Talbott, *The Russia Hand*

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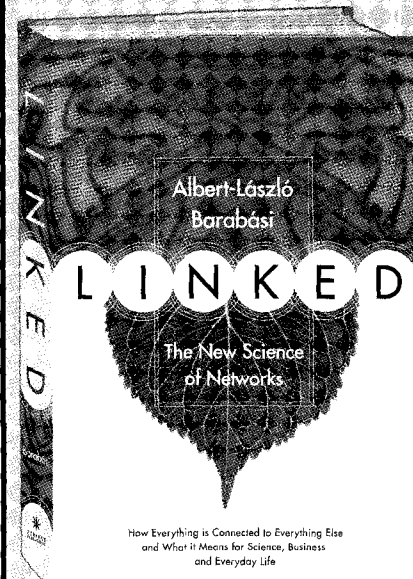
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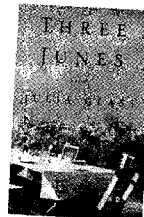
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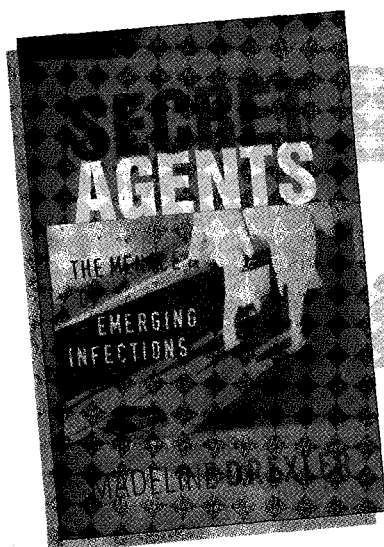


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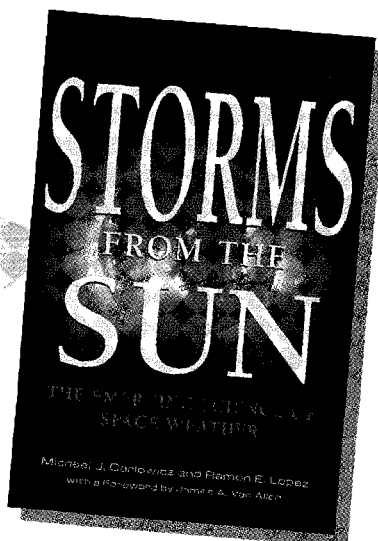
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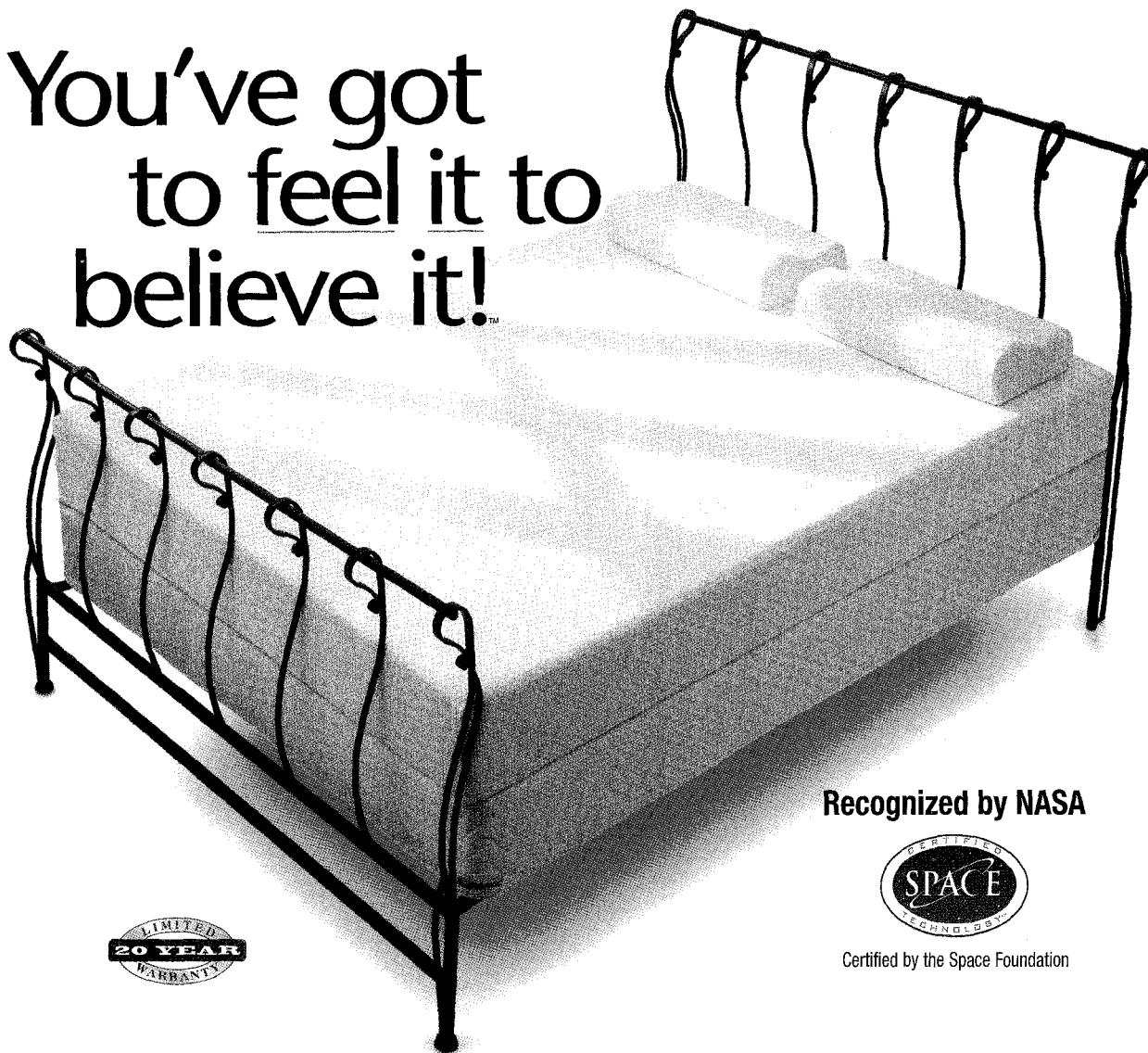
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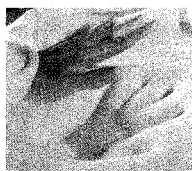


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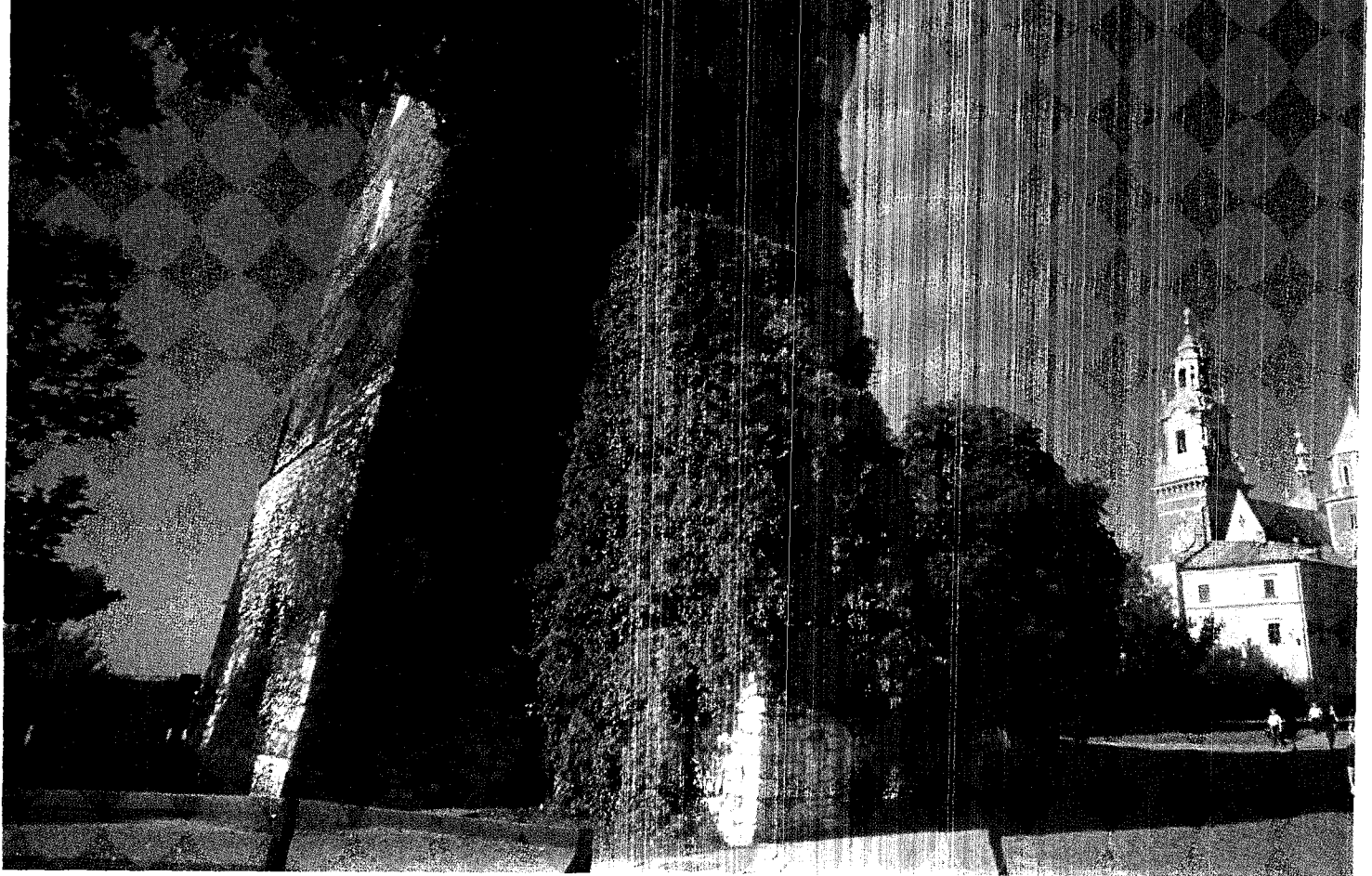
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TRAVEL

THE JEWEL OF POLAND*Once again, many-faceted Kraków sparkles*

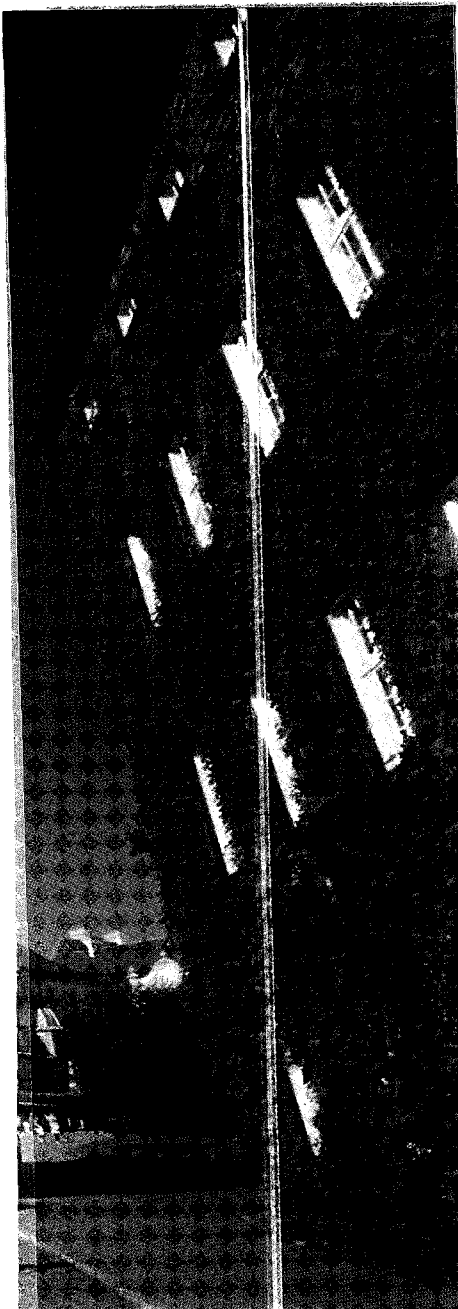
BY LAWRENCE WESCHLER

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On a brisk, sunny morning this past spring I was back in Kraków, lounging at one of the hundreds of outdoor café tables scattered around the vast medieval Market Square—the largest of its kind in Poland and, reputedly, in all of Europe. Off to the side, from a window in the tower of the part Gothic, part Art Nouveau Saint Mary's Church, the *hejnal* kicked in: a haunting trumpet solo that is sounded live every hour on the hour by a trum-

peter who abruptly cuts himself short in midstrain. This happens in commemoration, it is said, of a thirteenth-century trumpeter, a watchman felled in midclamor when a Tatar arrow pierced his throat. Next the fellow closes the window and opens the next one over, repeating the ritual at the four cardinal points of the compass. A classic gesture from an earlier, romantic Polish era: martyrdom, not just once but four times an hour.

I found myself imagining the guy's view from up there, one of the highest vantages in the city. Kraków constitutes a focal node of history, a place where the great themes converge and knot up and radiate back outward. Over there, for example, about a half mile to the south, the fellow could doubtless see, atop its promontory overlooking the Vistula River, Wawel Castle, home to more than 500 years' worth of Polish kings (and their tombs). Among them was Kazimierz the Great, who in the 1360s founded the Jagiellonian University (one of the oldest in Europe, after those in Bologna and Prague). The university's spires and gabled roofs should in turn be visible to our trumpeter, just to the west of the square. It was also



On the grounds of Wawel Castle

gleaming blue lap pool slotted into its arched stone cellar.

As the years passed, Wawel remained a sort of shrine to Polish nationhood, especially after 1795, when the country disappeared from the map of Europe altogether, divvied up among three adjacent empires. The Austrians refitted the castle as a provincial garrison. Austria-Hungary's was the mildest of the three occupations, which may have something to do with why the Polish independence fighter Jozef Pilsudski and the exiled Russian revolutionary Vladimir Lenin both made the town their base in the years leading up to World War I. (Our trumpeter could easily spy their various lodgings scattered about the Old Town.) After the war the two went on to lead their respective regenerated countries, and even briefly went to war with each other, in 1920. Less than two decades later Poland was being divvied up again, this time by Stalin and Hitler, and Hans Frank, the dread Nazi "Butcher of Poland," made Wawel his headquarters; he herded the town's Jews over the river into the Podgorze district, the site of Oskar Schindler's factory and, a bit farther on (though possibly still visible to our trumpeter), the Plaszow concentration camp, in whose factory so many of them were worked to death. And, of course, about forty miles to the west are Auschwitz and Birkenau.

For all the horror of Frank's occupation of Wawel Castle, it was perhaps thanks to his tenure there that Kraków, almost alone among major Polish cities, was spared the wholesale destruction wrought by the retreating Nazis. (Reluctant to smash up his private jewel-box fiefdom, the disbelieving Frank dallied till it was too late.) And so houses here are still occupied by families who have held them for generations, which may explain why after the war Kraków proved to be one of the most difficult areas for Stalin's new Polish Communist overlords to subdue. These leaders decided to punish the recalcitrant bourgeois enclave by erecting, just to its east, an otherwise senselessly sited mammoth in-

dustrial town, Nowa Huta, with tens of thousands of New Workers carted in to man its hideously belching Lenin Steelworks.

The ensuing years would see an ongoing struggle between the Communist authorities and the dynamic new archbishop of Kraków, Karol Wojtyla, for the souls of those workers, a struggle incarnated in the battle to erect a modernist, arclike Church of Our Lady Queen of Poland amid the workers' tenements. It was Wojtyla who at last prevailed, in 1977 (the crucifix spire of the church pierces the horizon to the east), a year before his ascension to the papacy, as John Paul II. A few years after that, and much to the exasperation of the Communists, those model workers from Nowa Huta would prove among the fiercest partisans of the Solidarity movement, even after the imposition of martial law in December of 1981. Indeed, in August of 1988 it was from the Lenin Steelworks that the climactic set of strikes began, under the slogan "What one Lenin started, let another finish off!" And so another did, signaling the death throes of communism in Poland and, within a few months, throughout Eastern Europe and all the way back in Russia itself.

Quite the little panorama.

Down below the tower the Market Square was filling up, as it does just about every day from Easter through late fall—with tourists, yes, but mainly with townspeople, whose sense of time seems to differ from that of their far more driven countrymen up in the capital, Warsaw. With the transition out of communism, Warsaw has bought into capitalism whole—everyone is busy plotting deals, calculating angles, nurturing contacts, making money. Warsaw, Krakovians are fond of saying, is where you should go if you intend to make a living. Kraków is where you should stay if you want to live.

The transition has been particularly felicitous in Kraków. Fifteen years ago, when the country was under martial law, I used to visit the town as a foreign correspondent, and in those days the Market Square was a dispiriting, dispirited place, often choked by a thick in-

Kazimierz who offered Europe's Jews safe haven during a period of intense persecution, though a century later, following a huge influx of expelled Spanish Jews, his successors relegated Kraków's Jews to the Kazimierz district, farther south and a bit to the east, just beyond Wawel. Likewise visible from up there in the tower, though a bit closer in to the south, is the house where Copernicus lodged in the 1490s, soon after studying at the university. Recently the building was transformed into a hotel, bearing the astronomer's name, which happened to be where I was staying on this trip (ask for the truly splendid Room 301!). Relatively expensive, the place offers a fetching combination of Gothic and hypermodern, with a

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dustrial haze, the passersby terminally glum, the state-owned shops closing up tight by early nightfall. The collapse of communism shut down some of the most egregiously polluting industrial behemoths, including parts of Nowa Huta—and the air is much clearer. In addition, the transition unleashed entrepreneurial energies, with cafés and bars and shops and beer gardens opening up in seemingly every nook and corner. In summer the square teems, a happily roiling carnival every night till well past two.

"It's almost impossible to get anything done in this city," a friend who had joined me at my outdoor table remarked as we observed the passing scene. "You can't get from one side of town to the other without encountering someone along the way, being drawn into a café, and passing hours at a time in conversation. Maybe that's why this is such a great town for poets. I can't

of an annual Easter Beethoven Festival, featuring some of the world's foremost performers. Krzysztof Penderecki (who often conducts the local philharmonic) lives here, as did the late Witold Lutoslawski, and Henryk Gorecki hails from just down the road, in Katowice. And Kraków is a town of art—with, to cite just a couple of my favorites, the Czartoryski collection, an exquisite Frick-scale trove featuring one of Leonardo da Vinci's most meltingly empathic portraits, *Lady With an Ermine*; and a museum entirely given over to the legacy of the early modernist playwright and Art Nouveau painter Stanislaw Wyspianski (make time to see, as well, his luminous stained-glass windows in the nearby Franciscan Church). And there's always something fresh and bracing and worth checking out on the theater and cabaret scene.

"Not bad for a small garrison town" is how the ninety-one-year-old Milosz

Krakovians are less driven than their countrymen in the capital. Warsaw, they are fond of saying, is where you should go if you intend to make a living. Kraków is where you should stay if you want to live.

imagine trying to write a novel here, what with all the interruptions, but the pace of life is perfect for poetry."

Kraków is a great town for poets—arguably the greatest in the world on a per capita basis. With Czeslaw Milosz's recent return from Berkeley, the town now claims two Nobel laureates, the other being the incomparable Wislawa Szymborska. Adam Zagajewski, who is probably the leading poet of the successor generation, is returning too, from his exile in Paris. Tomas Venclova, the great Lithuanian poet (perennially short-listed for the Nobel), recently bought an apartment here. Dozens of poets of slightly lesser rank call Kraków home, and every three years premier poets from throughout the world converge for one of the most engaging poetry festivals going (the next one is slated for September of 2003).

But then, Kraków is a town of composers and musicians, too. It's the site

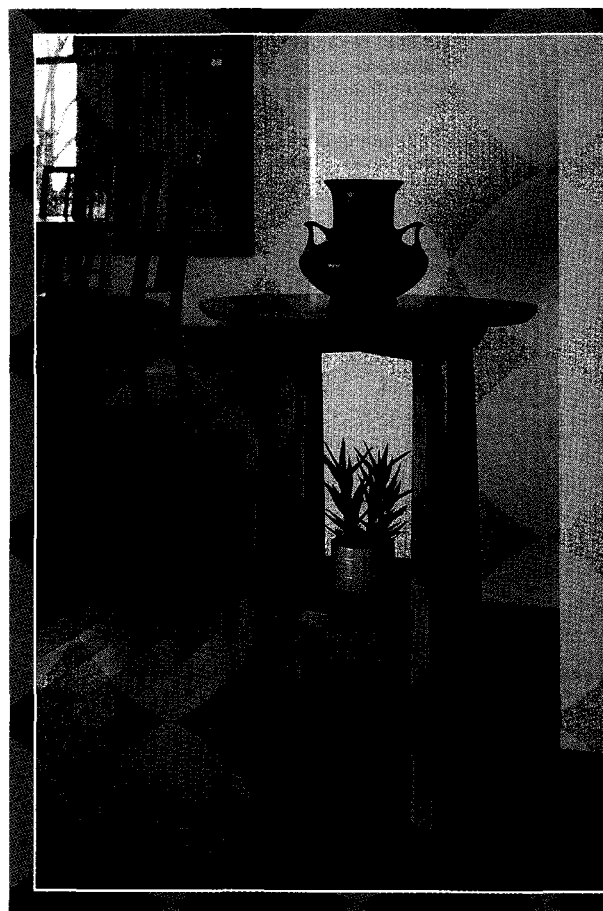
had parsed matters for me the previous afternoon, a gleam in his eye. He was referring to Kraków's Austro-Hungarian incarnation, and indeed, one still encounters a good deal of dreamy nostalgia for that Hapsburg era among Krakovians today. For instance, Robert Maklowicz, a youngish, impish, and quite celebrated local gourmet and flaneur, universally referred to as Bobek, who soon joined my friend and me at that table in the Market Square, began rhapsodizing: "Right over there, at the Secession Restaurant, it used to be you could sample oysters plucked out of the Dalmatian Coast that very morning—lobsters, scampi, fresh that very day!" When was this? "Before the War . . . 1912." And just exactly how old was he now? "Thirty-seven." Unfazed, he resumed: "We're at the same distance here from the Adriatic as we are from the Baltic," he claimed, a bit hyperbolically, "and in those days train service

was twice as fast to Trieste as it was to Danzig. But then the borders went up—and I still don't understand why, what was wrong with the old way?—and suddenly all you could get was cod. Cod, cod, cod."

His eyes misted over, much to the amusement of my table companion. "There used to be eight trains a day to Vienna—five of them express," Bobek continued. "Vienna is as close as Warsaw. You could go for an evening to the opera—many people did—and catch the night train home. And to this day, traveling south from Kraków, I am at home everywhere. Which is because here we are in Central Europe. Thirty kilometers north of here"—the demarcation line of the old partition—"Eastern Europe begins."

To Bobek's mind, the great thing about Hapsburg Kraków was its cosmopolitanism, a throwback to the city's Jagiellonian heyday, in the fifteenth century. And at his urging, later that afternoon I took a walk through Kazimierz, the old Jewish section—a hollow shell, to be sure, of its former self. Nonetheless, Steven Spielberg chose the district for the location shoot of *Schindler's List*, and ever since, there has been a huge surge of interest in all things Jewish among Poland's urban young (perhaps not unlike the American hippie romance with all things Native American a generation ago). The heart of the Kazimierz district, around ul. Szeroka, has been thoroughly revived; it has several synagogues, some dating back to Gothic times; a medieval cemetery; bookstores and restaurants specializing in Jewish fare (check out the cozy, leafy comforts of Ariel's); and, toward the end of every June, a world-class and singularly unkitschy international Jewish Cultural Festival, featuring everything from klezmer jazz to contemporary arts and Yiddish theater, the product of the tireless efforts of a young local promoter, a goyische schnorrer by the name of Janusz Makuch.

Come nightfall these days, and around its edges, Kazimierz also plays host to a remarkable bar scene: dark, labyrinthine haunts with names like Alchemia, Propaganda, Habana, and



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MEN'S STYLE



Singer, packed to the rafters with young patrons, mainly students, embroiled in passionate disputations, often till near dawn. "What I love about this town," a local editor told me, gazing out over the crowd late that evening at Alchemia, "is this combination of youth and tradition." A graduate student nearby concurred, saying, "This is a town for students and old people. In fact, it would be best for you if upon graduation you could just turn seventy; otherwise, there's not much for you."

Soon the diminutive Bobek arrived, flanked by his sidekick Bikont, a veritable mountain of a man: clearly a fellow of gargantuan appetites. They had just come from a meeting of the self-styled Galician Academy of Taste, whose members, all men ("macho sybarites" is how I heard them characterized the next day by a less than charmed female critic), convene annually to nominate finalists for their coveted Golden Jackdaw award—the restaurants, that is, of the year. (The group would reconvene a few weeks later to settle on a winner, after having thoroughly refamiliarized themselves with the offerings of the various finalists. A tough job, but somebody has to nominate himself to do it.) This year's finalists turned out to include my hotel's restaurant, also called Copernicus, which specializes in so-called nouvelle traditional Polish cuisine; Pod Roza; Culiwer; and Jarema, an elegantly cozy place where I happened to have fetched up the evening before. (I can't commend highly enough Jarema's traditional eastern-Polish fare: venison, quail, meat in aspic, trout, an uncanny beet dish, and an improbably refreshing bread beer.) At any rate, conversation around the table turned to epicurean standards, and everybody had an opinion—including a student who leaned over, protested that all these places were well outside any student's budget, and recommended U Stasi, an Old Town pierogi dive that starts ladling out its superlative dumplings at around noon and continues, or so the sign in the window informs patrons, "until we run out."

The mood in the bars is wonderfully

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convivial and welcoming, and since there are so many students, one is likely to find at least a few willing to practice their English. But Americans especially need be forewarned: the places are like machines for turning tobacco leaf into smoke. You literally can't make out the far side of the room, maybe fifteen feet away. One fellow suggested that I break the filter off one of his cigarettes and at least breathe through that: it would doubtless be healthier, he assured me, than breathing the ambient smoke straight.

After an evening in a Kraków bar the best place to spend the next morning may be the salt mines—in particular, the Wieliczka Salt Mine, reputed to have some of the purest air in the world. The guides explain that the caverns' salt walls, with their negative charge, magnetically attract all the positively charged impurities floating in the atmosphere. The mine is about half an hour out of town to the southeast (buses leave often throughout the day from the central station, or you can hire a taxi for the morning). It was in continuous operation for more than seven centuries, during which the miners burrowed deeper and deeper, carving underground chambers out of the thick veins of rock salt in a process that went on till just a few years ago, by which point more than 2,000 chambers on nine levels (ranging from depths of about 210 to about 1,070 feet) were vertically connected by dozens of shafts and horizontally connected by more than 120 miles of corridors. (There's even a thriving overnight health spa on Level Five!)

The mine tours, which leave every half hour or so (English-language versions are scattered throughout the day), begin with a mesmerizing corkscrew descent of 378 steps from the surface to the shallowest level. And though it's all sort of kitschy in a mass-touristy way, then again, it's emphatically not. For one thing, visitors have been touring these mines almost since their inception. Copernicus came through, as did Goethe and Pilsudski and John Paul II—their visits memorialized by stout likenesses carved out of salt. The sculp-

tures and all the other detailing (intricate bas-relief renditions of Leonardo's *Last Supper* and other paintings) are the creation of generation upon generation of miners. In addition, there are heartrending dioramas illustrating the sheer labor, and the dangers and the ingenuity, involved in excavating the treasured rock—showing, for instance, the way workhorses were winched down steep shafts, never to see the light of day again.

Our tour burrowed past poignant chapels and chandelier-decked pavilions (sites of glittering midnight balls during the Hapsburg era) and vast networks of drainage sluices and cart tracks. There were crystal-clear underground lakes so mineral-saturated that they cannot absorb another gram of salt, and hence no longer dissolve their shores, and vast, hangarlike vaults, some more than half a soccer field deep (sites recently, we were told, of the world's first underground bungee-jumping competitions). Deeper and deeper we went, past intricate, Escher-like concatenations of perpendicular rafters and stanchions, till we at last reached Level Three, the deepest we would be allowed to visit on the public tour, 443 feet below ground level. (We were urged not to worry: on the far side of that level we would quickly be spirited to the surface, in narrow shaft elevators.)

We entered a huge vault, perhaps the vastest yet, and noticed an incongruous Star of David hanging over its entrance. It turns out that this chamber was once even deeper, but during the war the Nazis coated the bottom with a thick layer of concrete, the basis for a factory in which enslaved Jews spent their last days manufacturing the V1 rockets that would presently rain down on London.

There is no place in Kraków not steeped in history. A plaintive trumpet sounds—or maybe so one merely imagines—and is cut off abruptly in midstrain. ▀

Lawrence Weschler is the director of the New York Institute for the Humanities, at New York University, and a former correspondent for The New Yorker. He is the author of numerous books, including Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder (1995) and Calamities of Exile (1998).



MUSIC

UNIRONIC

Bill Frisell draws from a wide spectrum of music identified with the American experience—and country music is a persistent echo

BY FRANCIS DAVIS

♦♦♦♦

Bill Frisell With Dave Holland and Elvin Jones is a jazz album, but one of my favorite tracks from it is a kind of modern-day cowboy ballad called "Justice and Honor," which the guitarist Frisell first recorded on *Ghost Town*, his 2000 solo album. This newer version moves along more briskly, thanks to Frisell's edgy interaction with Holland, a bassist who made his name with Miles Davis before winning praise as the leader of his own small groups, and Jones, the drummer who chased John Coltrane through his marathon solos in the 1960s. Who but the guileless Frisell would invite a bassist admired for his harmonic sophistication and a black drummer who gives the impression of being an African chieftain to join him for a rendition of Stephen Foster's "Hard Times Come Again No More"? The song, written in

1854 in response to a cholera epidemic and growing unemployment in western Pennsylvania, isn't one of Foster's celebrations of plantation life—but still.

Frisell's style of jazz has been tagged "Americana," because over the years he has recorded pieces by Foster, Charles Ives, and Aaron Copland (along with ones by Sonny Rollins, Thelonious Monk, and Ornette Coleman), and because so many of his own compositions evoke images of "cumulus clouds drifting high above the Great Plains," as one writer put it. But Frisell has also played songs by Muddy Waters, Hank Williams, Bob Dylan, and Madonna—American originals whose music is likely to arouse feelings other than simple patriotism and national unity. And even at its most melodic and high-stepping, Frisell's music seems haunted and disquieted,

more Edward Hopper than Grant Wood or Norman Rockwell, evocative not just of rivers and prairies and small-town parades but of lost highways, dead-end streets, and heartbreak hotels.

A rural sensibility has been discernible in Frisell's playing since the beginning of his recording career, in the late 1970s. Five years ago, at the suggestion of the president of his record company, he made an album in Nashville. "I hated country music when I was growing up in Colorado," Frisell told me recently. "It was, like, the most *uncool* thing you could imagine. But you heard it all the time, and it was right there in so much of the jazz and pop music that I really liked—Dylan, Sonny Rollins's *Way Out West*, the things that Gary Burton did with Larry Coryell on guitar in the 1960s. So going to Nashville didn't feel like that big of a jump."

Still, no one hearing Frisell for the first time on *Nashville* or his new *The Willies* is likely to mistake him for a jaded country session guitarist amusing himself with a few Django Reinhardt licks. It isn't just that Frisell's chords are more complex than those of most country guitarists, or that his rhythms are knottier than theirs. His music is moodier and more atmospheric than anything on the country charts, and it speaks with a different regional accent—it recalls an era when country was called country and western. *Quartet*, an album from 1996 that still represents Frisell's high mark as a composer and arranger, featured an unusual and spartan instrumentation of guitar, violin, trumpet, and trombone, with no rhythm section as such. It includes two trancelike numbers that resemble dissonant variations on "Deep in the Heart of Texas." The tall-in-the-saddle lyricism of his multi-tracked electric and acoustic guitars on "Justice and Honor" from the album with Holland and Jones recalls Gene Autry and other singing cowboys of the 1930s and 1940s. It also recalls the lone riders of revisionist westerns—all those reformed gunslingers and disillusioned ex-marshals whose peace with themselves depends on taking no more lives on their way to Boot Hill. In the Old West conjured by Frisell that's where every trail seems to lead.

MICHAEL WILSON

I hear Frisell's music as dark, and this was something I brought up with him during one of his visits to New York last year from Seattle, where he lives. (A commuter to the city from Hoboken, New Jersey, for the ten years or so that he was a regular on the downtown music scene, Frisell moved to Seattle in 1989, soon after the birth of his daughter, looking for "an easier place to raise a kid" and "somewhere I could have a house and just sit down and think.") I asked if playing music was for him a way of safely channeling emotions he might otherwise be hesitant to express. He nodded in apparent agreement. "I *think* it's healthy," he said. "Maybe if everybody played a little bit of music, somehow—" He stopped, catching himself in a cliché. "I know that sounds ... But I keep thinking things might be a little better."

Frisell's end of a conversation is often full of repeated and amended and aborted thoughts—like David Mamet in slow motion and without the aggression or profanity. He talks as though he is almost but not quite thinking aloud. "I can't imagine what I would be like if I didn't play," he went on, his hands and then his fingers assuming positions they might if he were playing right then. Boyish at fifty, with round wire-rimmed glasses and wavy, colorless hair, he looked like a man playing air guitar but too inhibited to squeeze his eyes shut and toss his head back and curl his lips in simulated ecstasy. "Certain things that come out that way—what would they ...? How would they be expressed if ...? It's frightening to think."

When I asked Frisell what he had been listening to lately, he spoke enthusiastically about a version of Bob Dylan's "Knocking on Heaven's Door" by the South African a cappella group Ladysmith Black Mambazo, with a lead vocal by Dolly Parton. "She totally kills me," he said. "I love it when things go together that aren't supposed to but it all makes perfect sense." He might as well have been defending his apparent effrontery in having played the folk song "Shenandoah" the night before at the Blue Note, a Greenwich Village jazz club, with a band that included a pedal steel guitarist. "I like when it's impossible to

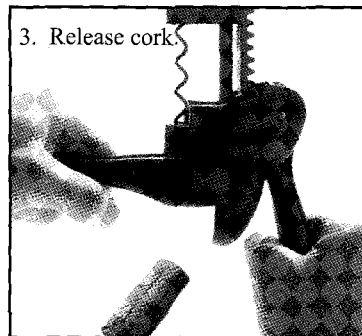
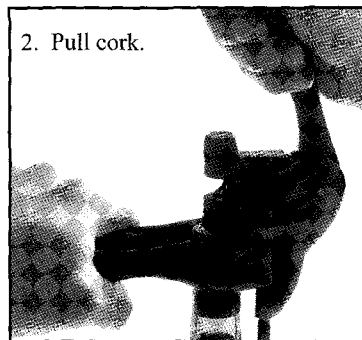
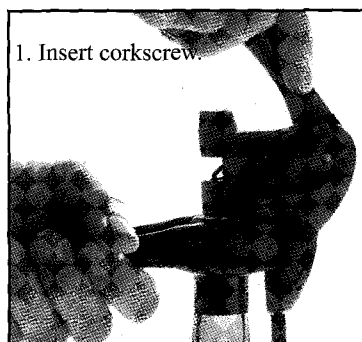
tell at first if something is black or white, or country or blues, or whatever," he told me. "The simplistic way of looking at it is to say a lot of the stuff we listen to now started in Africa and evolved into the blues and jazz and everything else when it came to America. But you hear some of these contemporary African guitar players, and you can tell that they've been listening to hillbilly records."

For Frisell, this amounted to a speech. He isn't inarticulate or unforthcoming, just shy and noticeably self-conscious (he once told a radio interviewer that he hoped one day to work up enough nerve to sing in the shower). Frisell puts his shyness to work for him musically; it's part of what his music seems to be about. He has this in common with Jim Hall, a fellow guitarist who was already well established in jazz when Frisell, as a young man in the early 1970s, studied privately with him. "I had a total of eight lessons with him, and that was going on thirty years ago now," Frisell told me. "But that was the beginning of a lot of the harmonic things that I still do—harmonizing scales using different intervals, trying to break out of the stock chord voicings, thinking about harmony more like a pianist would." In the 1950s, around the same time that rock guitarists were first cranking up their amps, Hall discovered that amplification permitted him to play more *quietly*. "I love to take the sort of thing that Jimi Hendrix might have done by practically letting his amp explode," Frisell told me, "but sort of miniaturize that sound and have it be on the same dynamic level as an acoustic instrument."

Frisell's distinction (his variation on Hall, one might say) has been to take techniques associated with high-decibel exhibitionism—feedback, reverb, distortion, and the like—and use them to assist in introspection. Next to his guitars and amp, the most important piece of equipment he owns might be the Electro-Harmonix delay, a "little box," as he describes it, that plays back pre-recorded sound loops of his own playing. "What I'm playing is passing through the machine all the time," he explained, "and eight seconds later or whenever, depending on the setting, it'll come back at me speeded up or backwards or what-

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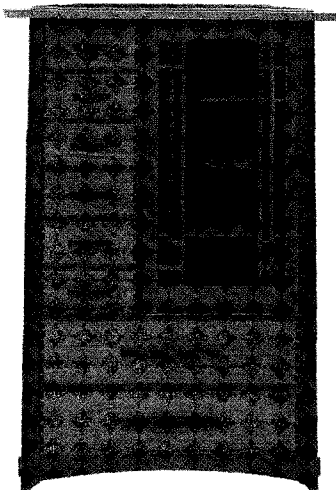


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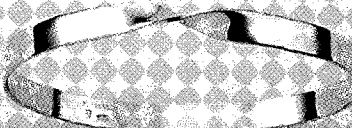
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ever, as something I have to respond to." Over the years countless improvisers, including Miles Davis, have given the impression of being alone with their thoughts. Thanks to his loops, Frisell's thoughts have an audible presence.

If not for his guitars and the gizmos he plugs them into, you might never notice Frisell, and that would be fine with him. Words sometimes fail him, but his fingers never do. His notes are bell-like, and their order is logical and precise. His economy as a soloist—he somehow gets his point across in spite of never coming out and making it—gives his playing more in common with his speech than he perhaps realizes. The combination of Frisell's hangdog stage manner and his elliptical improvisations has always put me in mind of someone, and it wasn't until I sat across from him with a notebook and a tape recorder that I figured out who it was. In the 1970s sitcom starring Bob Newhart as a psychologist one of the patients was a chronically unassertive fellow named Mr. Herd. In one episode Mr. Herd took a job selling some service or other door to door. He had memorized what he thought was a good sales pitch, but he never got a chance to deliver it. Too shy to ring a stranger's doorbell, he would come to a house and cool his heels on the porch, hoping that the occupant would eventually notice him there and out of curiosity invite him in. Frisell's music is like that. It leaves an awful lot up to you, including the question of whether it's jazz or something else altogether.

"Oh, boy," Frisell said when I put that question to him, though he must have known it was coming. Jazz, he finally said, "is still the best way of describing ... the mechanics of what I do." He said, "If I have a pedal steel guitar in my group, someone can say, 'Oh, then it must be country music.' But that's just on the surface. The examples I learned from—Sonny Rollins and Thelonious Monk and people like that ... a lot of it is, for me, not copying them, or anything like that ... but trying to imagine what they would be thinking in the same situation."

"Then again," he added, after another of his characteristic pauses, "I guess I don't even know what jazz is supposed to be anymore."

Nobody does, really. Wynton Marsalis and the documentary filmmaker Ken Burns might loudly insist that they do, but they are fighting a battle their side lost decades ago. Before 1960 or so, when there were essentially only three kinds of jazz to worry about (New Orleans, swing, and modern or progressive), educated discourse usually began with a definition, or at least with a checklist of attributes that supposedly identified a musical performance as jazz. These checklists were unreliable even then. Jazz was syncopated and made generous use of "blue" notes hidden in the cracks between the keys of the piano—but that was equally true of pop music, which, like jazz, evolved from ragtime and the blues. Jazz was improvised—but hardly ever from beginning to end, and in the notable case of Duke Ellington, who was a jazz musician by any worthwhile definition, occasionally not at all. The only safe bet seemed to be that you would know jazz when you heard it.

All that was before John Lewis and Gunther Schuller led a campaign to integrate jazz and the classics into a "third stream"; before John Coltrane and others began improvising on scales from India and rhythms from Africa; and before Miles Davis sanctioned the use of rock and funk riffs on his 1969 album *Bitches Brew*, forever blurring the line between innovation and compromise. So many other kinds of music have rubbed off on jazz in the decades since that a definition based on the assumption that jazz is somehow autonomous no longer seems realistic, let alone wise. It's jazz if the musicians playing it say it is and can find an audience to agree. About the only constant is that whenever something wholly original—a synthesis for which there is no ready-made niche—comes along, its legitimacy as jazz will be challenged by those for whom bebop remains the sole true path.

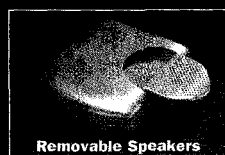
Frisell's music is a recent example. Frisell enjoys a sizable following, and his albums are generally reviewed favorably in specialist magazines such as *Down Beat* and *JazzTimes*; in fact, *Nashville* was voted the best album of the year in the 1998 *Down Beat* Critics Poll. But jazz critics are usually quicker than jazz audiences to embrace unorthodoxy, and Frisell's audience probably includes as

many guitar freaks as it does hard-core jazz fans. Some conservatives would even argue that Frisell's CDs are filed under jazz just because no one in retail has a clue where else to put them.

Jazz criticism is no less subject to trends than the music it evaluates. For much of the 1970s and 1980s the African roots of jazz were presumed to be inarguable. Burns's ten-part documentary series, broadcast on PBS last year, reflected a shift toward celebrating jazz as 100 percent red, white, and blue. In what seems a blatant inconsistency, the fact that Frisell draws from a wide spectrum of music identified with the American experience is precisely what disqualifies him as a jazz musician in the eyes of some of those who have been waving the flag for jazz.

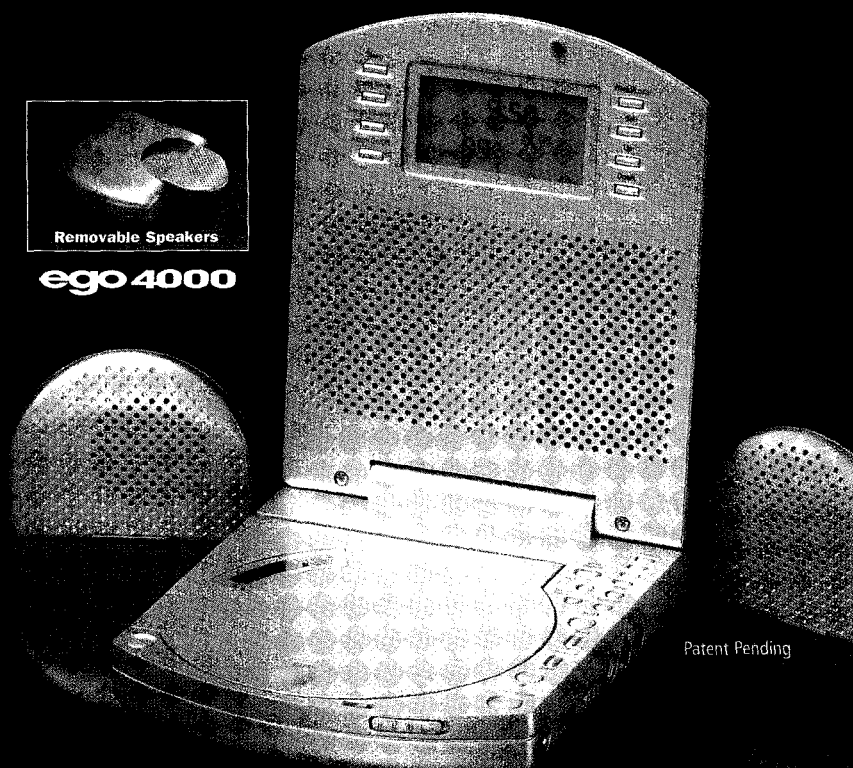
One reason Frisell is so difficult to place within the jazz continuum is that he has always seemed an odd man out in his own circles. He first gained widespread notice in the early 1980s, as a newcomer to the international roster of brooders and stargazers who recorded for the German-based label ECM; his playing and Pat Metheny's had a similar lyrical quality, and when Metheny moved from ECM to a major label, Frisell more or less became the house guitarist. ECM treats music almost as a form of prayer—a rapturous aesthetic, and one that was too confining for Frisell. He fell in with a roving band of genre-defying improvisers and composers who eventually set up camp at the Knitting Factory, a club on New York's Lower East Side. On any given night at the Knitting Factory in the late 1980s, depending on who the band-leader was and what older recordings he or she had recently unearthed, one might hear essentially the same group of musicians taking a whack at bebop, free jazz, fusion, Mahler, Ennio Morricone, Jimi Hendrix, or John Barry's themes for James Bond movies. The unifying thread was a sense of irony endemic to postmodernism. What set Frisell apart was that even his interpretations of such unlikely material as Stephen Foster's "Little Jenny Dow" and John Philip Sousa's "Washington Post March" were relatively *unironic*—a better word for them than "sober" or "earnest," because Frisell's attitude toward such material was far from humorless.

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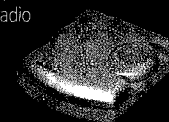
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“As I get older, I’m becoming more and more comfortable with the idea of playing something that was a part of my life,” Frisell told me, once we had broken the ice. “Some naive melody or childhood memory that I once would have thought wasn’t complicated enough.” The most surprising thing he said about himself was that as a teenager he played guitar and sang backup in a rhythm-and-blues band that required its members to wear dark glasses and flashy silver suits and to do nifty little unison dance steps, à la the Temptations and the Four Tops. Did Frisell participate in this choreography? “I did!” he said, as though he could hardly believe it either.

The son of a biochemist trained at Johns Hopkins, Frisell was born in Baltimore in 1951; his family moved to Denver when he was an infant. Both his parents were classical-music listeners (they courted at an orchestra subscription series), and at their urging Frisell started playing clarinet when he was about ten. Guitar was his own idea. “I was going to say that what drew me to it was the same thing that drew everyone—surf music and then the Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show*,” he said. “Everyone I knew was getting a guitar, and I was just going along. But I do remember being drawn to the guitar when I was very young. We got our first television when I was about five, and I used to watch *The Mickey Mouse Club* every day. At the end the host—this guy named Jimmie [Dodd]—would come on to say good-bye, and he had a guitar with a drawing of Mickey Mouse on it. Something about that appealed to me. I got a piece of cardboard and cut it into the shape of a guitar and put rubber bands on it for strings.”

Frisell’s family relocated to New Jersey after he finished high school, and that was when he looked up Jim Hall. He enrolled at the Berklee School of Music, in Boston, in 1971—a time when most of the other students and even many of the established jazz musicians on the faculty were looking for ways to combine bebop and rock-and-roll. But Frisell wanted no part of this; he had become a jazz snob. “I was kind of stuck in 1958,” he told me. “I had a guitar like Jim’s and a tiny amp, and I just wanted to be a bebop guy. Then, about three

years later, I realized I wasn’t being honest with myself. It *wasn’t* 1958.”

The CD with Holland and Jones is the most clear-cut “jazz” album Frisell has ever made. It even includes a nifty version of Henry Mancini and Johnny Mercer’s “Moon River,” with Jones playing brushes. (Though usually celebrated for his muscle and perspiration, Jones is capable of astonishing subtlety; both here and on “Convict 13” he produces an effortless soft shoe.) In playing with Jones, Frisell wanted to “bring him into my space,” he told me. “I mean, I didn’t want to play ‘My Favorite Things’ with him, or any of the other things that he did with Coltrane, because that’s not something I would be very good at anyway.” Frisell is too modest. His long solo, over Holland’s countermelodies and Jones’s broken rhythms, on a homespun piece called “Tell Your Ma, Tell Your Pa” is Coltrane-like in its forcefulness and sweep. And on the swirling “Strange Meeting,” as his improvisation grows heated, Frisell voices a few of his lines in octaves, as if bowing to the ghost of Wes Montgomery, the most influential jazz guitarist after Charlie Christian. The tune itself unfolds like a classic rock ballad—something the Eurythmics might have recorded as a follow-up to “Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This),” their big hit of 1983. Country music is merely an echo here. That may be just as well, because Frisell’s style is such a curious blend of influences (less a style, really, than a sensibility) that to overemphasize one aspect of it—which he does on *Nashville* and *The Willies*, as refreshing as they are—is to risk throwing everything off balance. But country music is a persistent echo, reminding some jazz listeners what gives them pause about Frisell.

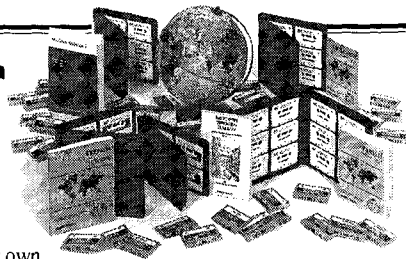
A union of jazz and country is nothing new. In the 1930s and 1940s Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys created a vogue for western swing, an infectious style that set hillbilly vocals to scaled-down versions of the riffs powering the era’s big bands. Over the years numerous country guitarists have had a go at jazz and have acquitted themselves admirably—Hank Garland and Chet Atkins are two examples. But jazz fans take pride in believing that in its couplings

with other forms of music, jazz is always the pitcher, never the catcher. Influence is assumed to be a one-way street, with exceptions made for the blues and Afro-Cuban music because their racial origins are similar to those of jazz. There is a particular bias against country music, because it is so white-identified—and so tarnished with memories of the Confederacy and Jim Crow. Despite all this, jazz musicians looking for a change of pace have occasionally performed country songs or recorded with Nashville sidemen; so far only Frisell has made country music an integral part of his style.

Someone was bound to, sooner or later. Country has plenty to offer jazz, beginning with the virtue it makes of simplicity. Bebop introduced a new level of harmonic complexity to jazz in the late 1940s, and John Coltrane upped the ante about ten years later. Innovation has frequently taken the form of attempts to shift the balance to melody: the most famous examples were Miles Davis's use of simple modal scales in place of bebop chord changes on his 1959 album *Kind of Blue*, and Ornette Coleman's abandonment of harmonic guidelines altogether around the same time. There have been less celebrated examples, one of which seems especially relevant to Frisell—the group Jimmy Giuffre 3 of the late 1950s, with Giuffre on clarinet and saxophones, Jim Hall on guitar, and either Ralph Peña on bass or Bob Brookmeyer on valve trombone. In the same way that Frisell borrows from country music, Giuffre borrowed from folk. He dispensed with the chattering cymbals and walking bass lines thought by many to be essential to jazz, and this made his group a source of consternation. But Giuffre's most radical departure from convention was in the deceptive simplicity of many of his compositions for the group, which were harmonically sophisticated without being arduously complex. Frisell doesn't seem to have been directly influenced by Giuffre. Still, he does seem to be moving in the same direction, toward what might be characterized as jazz by elimination—not jazz by default. ■

Francis Davis, a contributing editor of The Atlantic, was a 2001–2002 senior fellow in the National Arts Journalism Program at Columbia University. His book Afterglow: A Last Conversation With Pauline Kael will be published in September.

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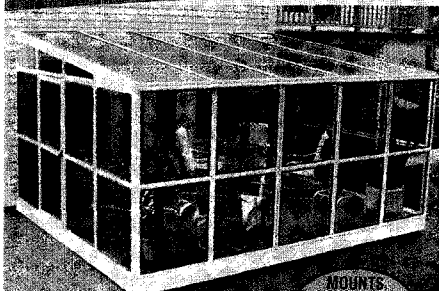
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THE HULA MOVEMENT

This ancient Hawaiian art is catching on nationwide—even worldwide

BY CONSTANCE HALE

.....

In the auditorium of an elementary school on San Francisco's Potrero Hill hula classes begin not so much with a bang as with a BOOM BOOM: the sound of two full-palm slaps on the side of a large hourglass-shaped Hawaiian gourd.

Sitting on the stage, his muscular legs encircling the gourd, is Patrick Makuakāne, who is half Hawaiian and has a shock of dark hair, obsidian eyes, and a baritone voice. Makuakāne spends his days as a personal trainer at the nearby World Gym, but in the evenings he is a *kumu hula*. In Hawaiian the term literally means "dance teacher," but its connotations are more nearly those of "guru." Facing him tonight are thirty-odd students, in five staggered rows, ranging in age from eight to eighty. The women wear sweatshirts and gathered cotton skirts, the men T-shirts and baggy shorts. Together, his students present the multicultural face of mainland hula. Among them are Luisa, a wiry Latina in a gray-blue baseball cap with the Nike logo; U'ilani, a native Hawaiian with striking cheekbones, a cascade of thick black hair, and tailored pants poking out below her hibiscus-yellow skirt; Calvin, a fine-boned Japanese violin player who chants perfectly in key; and this writer, a *haole*, or Caucasian, who grew up in Hawaii but has lived in California for twenty-one years.

Known as the Monday Night Class, we are part of Makuakāne's *hālau hula*, or traditional school of dance, with 160 members from all over northern California. My *hālau* is one of dozens in the Bay Area, and one of hundreds on the mainland. The ancient art of Hawaiian dance is stepping far beyond its origins in the Pacific archipelago.

"We're seeing a phenomenal growth in *hālau*, not just in California but farther east—in Las Vegas, Salt Lake City, Colorado, Arizona," says Amy Ku'uleialoha Stillman, an associate professor of music and culture at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor and the director of its

Asian/Pacific American Studies program. According to a list at the Hawaiian cultural Web site *mele.com*, people in thirty-four American states and six countries are dancing the hula. In Hawaii itself no fewer than eighty-nine *hālau* are thriving.

Things Hawaiian seem to satisfy many appetites these days. In certain cool circles on and near the West Coast men are wearing more Hawaiian shirts than basic black. The playlists of radio stations nationwide include the late singer Israel Kamakawiwo'ole's gentle medley of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" and "What a Wonderful World," for which he accompanied himself simply on a ukulele. Kamakawiwo'ole, whose



1993 album *Facing Future* continues to sell smartly and is by now one of the best-selling Hawaiian albums of all time, was featured on the soundtracks of *Meet Joe Black* and *Finding Forrester*. Hula may carry a similar appeal.

Indeed, a year ago this July almost 1,500 hula aficionados gathered on the Big Island of Hawaii for a conference featuring workshops on hula history, Hawaiian genealogy, ancient chants, and the relationship of hula to the land. The wide reach of hula surprised even

the conference's organizers. Kekuhi Kanahale, the executive director of the Edith Kanaka'ole Foundation, which co-sponsored the event, told me, "We began to realize the worldwide extent of hula when we received a registration from Egypt. Then the registrations kept coming—from Iran, Japan, Mexico, and all over the United States."

Named for the late hula icon Edith Kanaka'ole, an esteemed chanter and Hawaiian-language professor (and Kekuhi Kanahale's grandmother), the foundation was started in 1990 by Kanaka'ole's daughters Pualani and Nālani. In 1993 the sisters received a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts for perpetuating the ancient art of hula through their school, Hālau O Kekuhi. They have also written, choreographed, and performed in the first hula opera, *Holo Mai Pele*, which brought traditional hula to a national audience last October, when it aired as part of the PBS *Great Performances* series.

Holo Mai Pele makes clear how little real hula resembles the stereotype shown in Hollywood films like *Blue Hawaii* and *Waikiki Wedding*, wherein hula is a sweet, somewhat simple-minded dance performed by nubile Polynesians in grass skirts. Real hula is often powerful and provocative. The dance originated, according to one ancient myth, when the goddess Hi'iaka danced to appease her fiery sister Pele, the goddess of the volcano. In ancient hula there were, of course, no guitars or ukule-

les—only percussive instruments like sharkskin drums, feather-decorated gourds, bamboo stamping tubes, split-bamboo rattles, and stone castanets. Gesture was secondary to chanted poetry.

In pre-contact Hawaiian society, hula was the history book of a people without a written language. Hula chants were the sacred text maintaining the relationship between gods and mortals, heralding chiefs, celebrating sex and procreation, and venerating the subtleties of the natural world—the tumbling of waterfalls,

MARCELLUS HALL

the many faces of the moon, the myriad mists and rains of the tropics.

Calvinist missionaries arrived in the Hawaiian Islands in 1820 and, with the support of converted chiefs, denounced hula as heathen. Soon it was banned. Then, in the 1870s, hula found its savior. "Hula is the language of the heart and therefore the heartbeat of the Hawaiian people," King David Kalākaua proclaimed. Kalākaua, known as the "Merrie Monarch," revived the dance, and soon ancient elements of poetry and chant were being combined with new instruments and costumes.

For a time modernization suited hula little better than the missionaries had. By 1959, when Hawaii became a state, hula—along with traditional methods of fishing, the slack-key guitar, and the Hawaiian language—was on the wane. In the early 1970s, though, a by now celebrated Hawaiian cultural renaissance swept the islands, fueled by a potent combination of anti-development anger and fierce ethnic pride. The Merrie Monarch Festival, held annually in Hilo, had started promoting the art of hula in 1964, and over time the festival grew into a blockbuster event. (Last year almost 5,000 people attended.) The King Kamehameha Hula Competition, in Honolulu, began drawing *hālau* from the U.S. mainland. Since 1992 the World Invitational Hula Festival, in the outdoor Waikiki Shell, has helped hula competition go global.

Not all off-island *hālau* practice the strict, esoteric, and complex dance perpetuated by the likes of the Kanaka'ole sisters, but Amy Ku'uleialoha Stillman and others note the seriousness of many of the newer schools. "What's catching islanders off guard is the quality of the hula practiced on the mainland," Stillman told me earlier this year. "These are strong groups. They're serious contenders."

One of the first mainland *hālau* to win a prize in an island competition, fifteen years ago, is run by Māhealani Uchiyama, a forty-four-year-old African-American woman who started taking hula classes in Washington, D.C., at the age of thirteen. "After nine years of ballet," she told

me recently, "it had become clear to me that Western dance would offer few opportunities to a tall black woman. So I explored other traditions. Hula was the one that stuck."

Uchiyama moved to Honolulu in the mid-1970s to attend the University of Hawaii and stayed long enough to learn the language, pick up a Hawaiian given name (which refers to the second night of the full moon), and marry a Japanese-American fellow student. "Hula always resonated deeply for me," Uchiyama said. "It's as if I was born into it, even if I wasn't. I love the challenge—physically, psychologically, intellectually."

She moved to California in 1982, began an apprenticeship with a *kumu hula* in Hayward shortly thereafter, and in 1984 founded her own company in Berkeley. Nowadays, in a barnlike loft tucked between the Amtrak rails and the Magic Gardens nursery, this dreadlocked *kumu* with graceful, crane-like limbs teaches Hawaiian and Tahitian dance, and the Hawaiian language as well, to more than a hundred students.

Patrick Makuakāne, my *kumu*, began his career as a teenager dancing in Waikiki hotels and performed at Carnegie Hall in 1990, when he was twenty-nine. His professional troupe of forty men and women (the Sunday Class) performs what he calls *hula mua* ("progressive hula"), a syncretism of traditional movements with nontraditional music—Roberta Flack, say, or Dead Can Dance. Some of his hulas recount ancient legends; others make modern political points.

In the Monday Night Class, however, Makuakāne hews to tradition, passing on to students only time-honored styles of dance: *hula kahiko*, with its percussive, poetic chants honoring the powerful gods and legends of pre-contact Hawaii, and *hula 'auana*, the fluid, graceful dance done to the accompaniment of guitars and ukuleles and playfully celebrating the secular world. "Hula is life," Makuakāne is fond of saying. "It expresses everything we see, feel, hear, smell, taste, and touch."

It is this all-encompassing quality that gives hula the edge over more banal movement classes—aerobics, for example, or Jazzercise. Like these, hula

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Affordable and comfortable. You can spend thousands of dollars on a new mattress, but why do it? The Structure™ Memory Foam Mattress Topper can turn your existing mattress into an ideal sleep surface. The visco-elastic foam is 2 inches thick, which is the ideal thickness for providing comfort and retaining shape over time. When you lie down on this amazing material, the heat and pressure sensitive foam reacts to your body's weight and temperature, so that it molds to your exact body shape. This means that whether you sleep on your back, stomach or side, your weight is evenly distributed and your spine remains in a neutral position. Other surfaces support your body at the shoulders, hips and legs only. This causes your spine to sag in other areas, which can often result in discomfort, and even back pain. You'll wake up rested, relaxed and ready to

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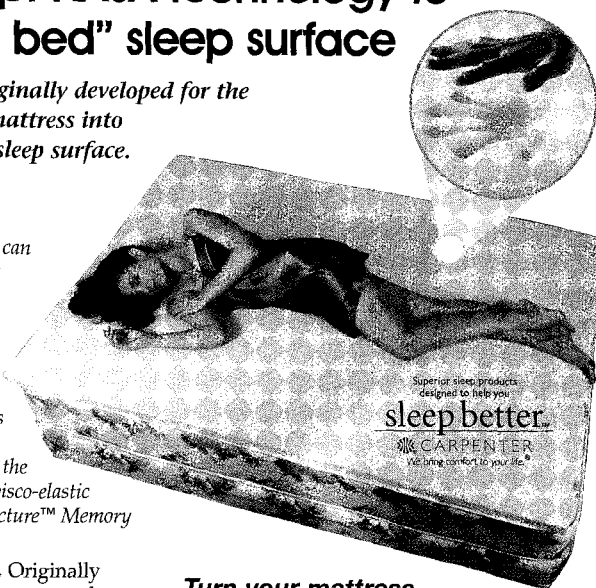
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Included with the Memory Foam Mattress Topper is a fitted mattress pad. It's heavyweight and quilted, and made of 200-count 100% cotton with a 15-inch deep fitted spandex skirt to fit a mattress up to 21 inches thick. The size of the mattress pad is determined by the size mattress topper you order.

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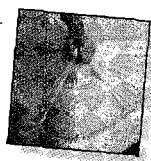
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is serious exercise: while your quads, hams, glutes, and hip extensors stretch and strain, your arms never stop moving. And your heart can really get pumping on some of the fast hulas that remain staples in the repertoire.

But hula works the heart in other ways, too. The recently re-released CD *Party Hulas*, by the legendary singer Genoa Keawe, is filled with sassy songs praising everything from the glory of a ship at sail to the dainty cheeks of a beloved. There's often more to the lyrics than the innocuous titles imply. "Noho Paipai" ("Rocking Chair Hula") is more about erotic mischief than about soothing maternal love.

Other dances are lyrical and poetic. "He Pō Lani Makamae" wonders at the beauty of a newborn child seen in the light of the full moon. One of the oldest dances, "Kaulilua," compares a mountain on Kauai to a woman. "Doubly cold is Mount Wai'ale'ale," it begins in recondite poetry. "Her eyes peer down on the stunted lehua tree."

How can an art form so deeply Hawaiian appeal to so many mainlanders, some of whom are barely familiar with the islands? "No other dance form—or even yoga—makes me feel as spiritually and emotionally full," my classmate Alicia Lo told me. Lo grew up doing ribbon dancing at Chinese school, spent her evenings frequenting nightclubs when she attended the University of California at Berkeley, and as a young adult competed as a Latin ballroom dancer.

After the glitziness of ballroom competition, with its contrived efforts to impress judges, Lo found hula "genuine, full of real feeling." And, she told me, it gave her a sense of belonging. "I have always struggled over fitting into this world, finding a connection with others. I feel alone a lot in life—like a black sheep. But dancing in line, sensing and watching each other, we are 'all for one and one for all.' Hawaiian people really accept you—even if you're not Hawaiian. Hula makes me feel part of something larger than myself." ■

Constance Hale lives in Oakland, California, and frequently covers Hawaiian politics and culture. She has been an editor at the San Francisco Examiner, Wired, and Health, and has written two books on language, *Wired Style* (1996) and *Sin and Syntax* (1999).

IL TRAPPETO & LA PESCHIERA

Restaurants worth building a trip around

BY CORBY KUMMER

.....

Sometimes food can taste so shockingly good that you have to glance away, hoping your tablemates won't notice the look on your face. Or so it is with me. Recently a spoonful of whole-wheat noodles and chickpeas in broth had that effect. The noodles were handmade by a woman who had been rolling pasta all her life, with flour made from wheat grown in the same region of Italy where I had the soup—Apulia, the heel of the Italian boot, and long the country's breadbasket. But it was the chickpeas that provoked my sybaritic moment. They made the canned version seem like salty pellets. These had the texture of milk-fed veal, and a light but authoritative flavor of the earth. They were noble.

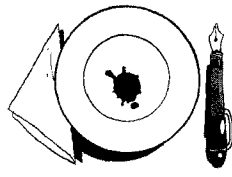
Italians shop for bottles of Apulia's artichokes, mushrooms, wild asparagus, and red peppers preserved in oil or vinegar, knowing that the hot sun, dry volcanic soil, and salty Adriatic breezes make for intense flavor. I go to the region as often as possible, for the beauty of its olive groves, carpeted with wildflowers and separated by waist-high stone walls, and for the odd charm of its *trulli*, houses topped by clusters of cone-shaped domes made of gray fieldstone with whimsical white-stucco finials. And, of course, for the vegetables.

I also go to stay at my favorite hotel—Il Melograno, a resort on a former farm that incorporates the original white-stucco buildings, which look almost Mexican in their rectangular simplicity. The new parts were literally built around centuries-old olive trees. Camillo Guerra, the owner, has a severe case of the Italian mania for construction. Since I first visited, in 1986, he has turned the old farm into a miniature city, with a convention center, a spa, and even a helipad. I recently watched Guerra, who is also an antiques dealer, supervise the furnishing of a new suite with elegant armoires and

tables and argue good-naturedly with a workman over the size and placement of a light fixture. He was in his element.

Happily, the constant construction has in the past three or four years resulted in Il Melograno's two restaurants, both close to the main highway south of the city of Bari. From October through early June the chef, Onofrio Serio, presides over Il Trappeto ("The Olive Mill"), a former olive press built in one of the many large caves nearby, which in medieval times were used as underground churches by Christians fearing Turkish invasions. From mid-June through mid-September Serio is at La Peschiera ("The Fish Pond"), a series of tented white-stucco pavilions accented with Apulia blue, the color of wisteria, at the hotel's private beach a few miles down the coast. Guerra, true to form, has just opened eleven guest rooms at La Peschiera, each one facing both the beach and a new Olympic-size pool. At both restaurants guests are greeted by several members of the wonderful and winning Guerra family.

Antipasti can easily ruin a meal. Here antipasti can easily—and should—be most of a meal, because they include many of Apulia's vegetable specialties. At a late-spring Trappeto supper Serio sent out warm narrow slices of what he called an onion calzone—not like the big pillows we think of but a flat covered pie with a thin yeast crust made with wine and olive oil and a filling of spring onions, olives, capers, anchovies, tomatoes, and wild fennel. Every ingredient in the filling was local. The fruity olive oil, powerful enough to make clear why it is a folk medicament (I considered each crisp *tarallo*, a small baked bread ring fragrant with olive oil, a step toward a therapeutic dose), is pressed from the olives of the hotel's trees, and in summer many of the vegetables come from the hotel's garden. The antipasti platter



APULIA
ITALY

included razor-thin slices of zucchini sautéed with darkened bits of garlic and garnished with vinegar and mint; orange-yellow peppers baked with bread crumbs and grated sheep's-milk cheese; deep-fried wedges of floured artichoke; and *sporchie*, fat purple wild asparagus that grows near the roots of fava plants. Even so, I had to have a second piece of the onion calzone.

Little twists and "cherries" of fresh mozzarella come with the antipasti, having been delivered that day from a town a few miles away; on Saturdays a cheese maker sets up a table in one corner of the restaurant and passes out warm, just-made mozzarella. On this trip I came to the heretical conclusion that buffalo-milk mozzarella, which I tasted at several farms south of Naples that are reputed to make some of the country's best examples, is overrich—buffalo milk has twice the fat content of cow's milk—and monotonous. The cow's-milk version at Il Trappeto was lightly chewy and impeccably sweet, with a tiny hint of refreshing acidity.

You can, of course, also have meat and fish. But after those antipasti I wouldn't want any main course other than the classic Apulian dish of the poor—*fave e cicorie*, a golden fava-bean puree like floury mashed potatoes with a more focused flavor, served with braised greens similar to escarole. This is food to play with: you're expected to mash the greens into the puree, and to mix it all with a thread of olive oil poured from the cruet that comes beside the dish.

Or you can follow the antipasti with a bowl of *ciceri e tria*, the pasta and chickpeas that had such a powerful effect on me, in a broth so rich in taste that I was sure it was twice-cooked poultry stock with perhaps a spoonful of meat glaze. Instead, Serio told me, it was simply water and the juice of the onions he had used as the base: another dish of the poor made rich by the Apulian sun and soil. ▀

Il Trappeto, Monopoli, 011-39-080-6909111. Open October to early June, 8:00 P.M. to midnight Tuesday through Saturday, 12:30 P.M. to 3:00 P.M. Sunday. Closed Monday. La Peschiera, Monopoli, 011-39-080-801066. Open every day from mid-June to mid-September, 12:30 P.M. to 3:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M. to midnight. Reservations and credit cards accepted.

Corby Kummer is a senior editor of The Atlantic. His book *The Pleasures of Slow Food* will be published in November.

BOOKS & CRITICS

BOOKS

FATAL ATTRACTION

Robert Caro does a lot of heavy breathing and grasping at the reader's lapels in his books on LBJ

BY RONALD STEEL

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To read one of Robert Caro's books on Lyndon Johnson, of which this is the third, is to wander into a psychodrama of epic proportions. Rarely has a biographer been engaged in such a long and ferocious struggle with his subject. This has been going on since the mid-1970s and appears likely to continue for another two or three volumes, as Caro moves Johnson out of the Senate and ultimately, one presumes, into the White House. At more than 1,100 pages, *Master of the Senate* is nearly as long as Caro's two previous volumes combined. In an era of long biographies, this is among the more leisurely. It is also among the most partisan.

This book is so long in part because Caro has many stories he wants to tell. Scores of pages are devoted to the roles of party whips and majority leaders and the function of Senate committees. Indeed, the first hundred pages are not about Johnson at all but, rather, recount the history of the Senate and how it operates. Caro's Senate is a body drunk on its own power for much of its history, "a mighty dam standing athwart, and stemming, the tides of social justice." But the Senate suffers far less at his hands than does Johnson, whom Caro describes as "a portrait in aggressiveness," a man so driven by his ambition that he "committed acts of great cruelty," and a "deceitful," "immoral," and "ruthless" man, given to "grabbing," "grasping" and "snarling" in pursuit of his selfish goals, shamelessly serving those

useful to him while crushing those who stand in his way.

This emotional vocabulary may sound over the top to some readers, but Caro has toned it down considerably from the two previous volumes, for which he was widely criticized. Here he

MASTER OF THE SENATE

by Robert A. Caro

Knopf, 1,167 pages
\$35.00

even manages to give Johnson credit for some accomplishments. It was Johnson, as he relates, who undid the seniority system that had allowed segregationist senators to lock up key committees; who put together a coalition to defeat the isolationist Bricker Amendment; who helped to ensure the censure of Joseph McCarthy; who broke ranks with his southern colleagues by refusing to sign the Southern Manifesto, which upheld segregation (as "one of the most courageous acts of political valor I have ever seen take place in my adult life," in the words of Oregon's liberal Senator Richard Neuberger); and who through his legislative genius broke the southern filibustering that had for more than seventy-five years blocked civil-rights legislation, thereby securing passage of the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1957.

Caro relates these actions in great and often compelling detail. Toward the end of the book he writes, "It was Lyndon Johnson, among all the white government officials in twentieth-century America, who did the most to help America's black men and women in their fight for equality and justice." But in Caro's telling even this historic achievement is marred by the fact that

Johnson's motives were not always pure or his methods above reproach. The thrust of the preceding thousand pages, with their tales of cynical compromises, unkind acts, and devious manipulations, is that despite his reputation, particularly among black people, as a champion of the civil-rights struggle, Johnson was not a true "hero of liberalism." He had not "always battled wholeheartedly for minorities." He had not done so, we are told, because as much as he honored justice, he honored ambition even more.

To serve that ambition, Caro tells us, Johnson formed tactical alliances with conservatives and racists; flattered powerful legislators who could be useful to him, such as Richard Russell and Sam Rayburn; did favors for the Texas oil and gas interests; took advantage of the "open and gregarious nature" of a kindly liberal like Hubert Humphrey; and punished those who opposed him, even if that meant "humiliating a senator." He was so driven that he could not see the "true depth of the antipathy toward him of northern liberals," and in his wheelings and dealings failed to grasp that "there was another world ... in which principles mattered far more than they did in the Senate."

In other words, Johnson was a politician, who while doing good deeds also engaged in some questionable and perhaps even shady practices. This is more shocking to Caro than it is likely to be to most of his readers, who may not have such high standards as he does—at least not for politicians. But Caro is the kind of moralist who is more concerned with the purity of a politician's heart than with the effectiveness of his actions. His Johnson was not morally untainted; he may have harbored "impulses that might be called noble," but in any conflict between his compassion and his ambition "it was the ambition that won."



Why was he so ambitious? Because he was driven by “desperation and fear, the fear of a man fleeing something terrible.” (Caro so likes this phrase that he uses it twice.) And what was that terrible thing? That he would be considered a failure, like his idealistic father. Caro makes this point time and again. It is his *Rosebud*. And like that famous sled, it is dramatically striking but explains little. Nobody likes to fail. Ambitious boys born in log cabins want to do better than their fathers. And if they think that their fathers are uninspiring, they will find others to emulate.

For Caro, ambition carries the stench of *power*, and no word in the lexicon disturbs him more. He is both fascinated by power and repelled by those who exercise it. He is like a religious fundamentalist in the grip of a sexual passion he cannot control and cannot extirpate. For him, the very existence of power is the abuse of power. His books are not so much biographies in any conventional sense as they are virtual lamentations on the evils of power. His first book, a study of the city planner Robert Moses and what Caro described as “the fall of New York,” was titled *The Power Broker*, a term suggesting shady tradeoffs. The Johnson series began with *The Path to Power*, in which the young Lyndon had no power at all but only aspirations.

Such a view of power in a sophisticated author and former reporter, who has presumably descended into the kitchen of politics, is odd. It is like being repelled by the realization that surgeons actually enjoy their bloody work. Few in the political arena are morally pure or devoid of ambition, and those few do not last long. To denigrate ambition and the quest for power does not put one on the side of the angels but, rather, establishes one as living in the clouds.

Although Caro grudgingly acknowledges Johnson’s achievements, the real juice of this book lies in his tales of Johnson’s underhanded and self-serving behavior. Unlike some biographers (David McCullough, for example, who seems to fall in love with the presidents he chronicles), Caro is fatally attracted to the kind of man he can hate. Nothing gets his Oedipal adrenaline

going like a successful, powerful man of great accomplishment and impure heart. Especially if that man is a liberal. Character flaws are Caro's specialty.

One of his favorite devices is moral counterpoint. In each of the Johnson books he finds—or fashions—a saint done in by his protagonist-sinner. In the second volume, *Means of Ascent*, Caro found his Sigmund—a simple, honest man, too decent and trusting to prevail over horse thieves—in the person of Coke Stevenson, a “beloved” Texas governor denied election to the Senate in 1948 by a conniving Johnson. Stevenson was a man's man; “he made Texans remember why they were proud of being Texans.” His people loved him because he “was not a politician but a hero.” Yet Stevenson lost the election by eighty-seven votes, because Johnson “stole” it. Or at least this is what Caro claimed in that book and claims again here, although he offers no

Texas, to prosecute a group of good ol' boys who had dragged a black man from his hospital bed and lynched him. Caro circumvents these revelations by suggesting that they are inconsequential, because “civil rights was not an issue in that campaign” that brought Johnson to the Senate. He then goes on to criticize Johnson for failing to support an anti-poll-tax bill during his run for the Senate in 1948. Blacks did not seem to hold this against him, however; as Caro admits, Johnson won a heavy majority among them.

The counterpoint hero, the anti-Johnson, of *Master of the Senate* is Leland Olds, the chairman from 1940 to 1949 of the Federal Power Commission, the government agency that regulated the creation and sale of power from natural resources. Described by Caro as a “former mathematics honor student” who wanted only to “be of service” and “to help human beings” by “mitigating

gin to deny Olds reconfirmation. What the episode actually showed was that Johnson was a political realist and at times was an opportunist—a crime of which most politicians stand convicted.

Anyone can nail Johnson for his bad deeds. Caro takes him to task even for his good ones. He tells us that in 1938, by assiduous lobbying in Washington, Johnson won for Austin one of the first federal grants for low-income housing. But there was a worm in the apple. Nearly half the units in a predominantly black and Mexican-American district ended up being occupied by whites. Caro suggests that this resulted from political opportunism on the part of Congressman Johnson, who named the top officers to administer the grant. But it might also have been political realism in a place where the city officials of the time quite probably would not have approved public housing otherwise.

As another example of Johnson's “deep compassion surrendering to true, deeper pragmatism,” Caro relates the story of Felix Longoria, a Mexican-American soldier killed in the battle for the Philippines. On being told that a funeral home in Three Rivers, Texas, would not accept the veteran's body, an outraged Johnson offered his help to the family and arranged for Longoria to be given a hero's burial in Arlington National Cemetery. But then, Caro tells us, “the backtracking began.” The indignant funeral director insisted that he had been misunderstood and had not denied Longoria burial. Complaints of false accusation began flooding into Johnson's office from irate city officials. Nevertheless, Longoria was buried at Arlington, and Johnson attended the funeral. That, however, was apparently not good enough. He had not, Caro tells us, invited the veteran's family to visit his office and have their picture taken with him. What is the point of this story? That Johnson, on being criticized by South Texas politicians, “learned the cost of siding with the oppressed” and thereafter was more careful about covering his political bases. Thus it is that no good deed goes unpunished.

Nor does anything else. Caro charges, for example, that Johnson helped to block a 1956 civil-rights bill because it

Caro's Johnson—covered with warts and bursting with ruthless ambition—is without ambiguity or complexity. He is someone we are supposed to find particularly despicable because he sometimes did good things.

more proof than he did last time around.

It is daring of Caro even to mention Stevenson again after his “legend” was demolished by Sidney Blumenthal in a review of *Means of Ascent* in *The New Republic* of June 4, 1990. Blumenthal, who had done his homework, revealed that the saintly Stevenson had for years been plagued by accusations of taking money for phony oil leases; had won election as lieutenant governor in 1938 with the help of an endorsement from the reactionary governor “Pappy” O'Daniel, who is generally believed to have stolen the 1941 Senate election from Johnson; and was himself accused of stealing votes in the 1948 election. Indeed, charges of ballot-box manipulation by both sides in 1948 were so widespread that it is impossible to be sure who won the election.

In the unkindest cut of all Blumenthal also revealed Stevenson's racism, support for segregation, and refusal in 1942, when he was the governor of

the evil of poverty,” Olds had the bad fortune to be a victim of a McCarthy-style hysteria that swept the country in the late 1940s. As a young radical in the 1920s, he had written articles denouncing religions that preached “the principles of the exploiting class,” and had argued that social justice would come only with the “complete passing of the old order of capitalism.”

Unsurprisingly, the oil and gas interests did not want Olds reappointed to his influential position when his second term expired, in 1949. Johnson chaired the hearings on his reconfirmation and, according to Caro, stacked the committee against him and undercut his defense. He did so, Caro suggests, to serve the Texas oil and gas interests, thus demonstrating that he “was not now and had never been a liberal.” But of course he was a liberal, as were many of the other senators who in a time of hysteria uncourageously voted by a 53–15 mar-



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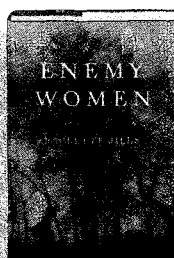
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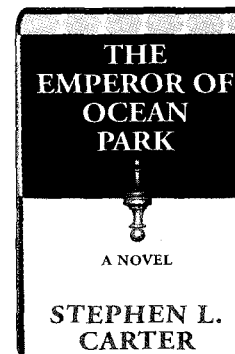


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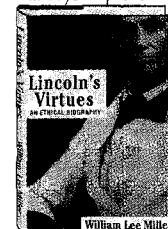
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threatened to impede his presidential ambitions. However, the fact is that most prominent liberals, including Adlai Stevenson, Eleanor Roosevelt, Hubert Humphrey, and Wayne Morse, opposed the bill, on the grounds that it was cynically designed to split the Democrats. Even Caro admits that only three Senate Democrats voted for what was "a hopeless gesture foredoomed to failure."

Although he prides himself on examining virtually every document relating to his subject, Caro somehow missed another important episode. According to Robert Dallek, in *Lone Star Rising* (1991), the first volume of his thorough and judicious biography, Johnson, beginning in the 1930s, helped hundreds of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi persecution to gain entry to Texas through Latin American countries. This action was striking at a time when few other politicians showed such concern. Perhaps Caro has no interest in it because it was, at least in part, a foreign-policy issue. In his single-minded concern with domestic questions, particularly civil rights and the legislative maneuvers within the confines of the Senate, Caro virtually ignores the great foreign-policy issues of Johnson's years in the Senate, including the charged debate over the formation of NATO; the argument over whether the United States should intervene in Indochina in 1954, after the collapse of the French colonial war there; and the Suez crisis of 1956.

For all its length, this book is very narrow in its focus. Its concerns are three: the obstructionist role of the U.S. Senate, the battle over civil rights, and, of course, the self-serving machinations of Lyndon Johnson. The first two are old stories, though retold in great detail. The third is a further installment of Caro's long-standing obsession.

Caro is of course not alone in being a biographer who dislikes his subject. Many writers choose to write about knaves. They are invariably more interesting than saints. Liking is not necessary—but understanding is. And understanding requires some emotional distance. Indignation, self-righteous or even righteous, is not sufficient. Only through what might be called literary empathy can a biographer show

us why a person behaved a certain way. Caro's Johnson—covered with warts and bursting with deceit and ruthless ambition—is without ambiguity or complexity. He is someone we are supposed to love to hate and find particularly despicable because he sometimes did good things. But to view Johnson so narrowly is to miss what made him a consummately interesting person.

Caro has the strengths of an investigative reporter, which is what he was, at the Long Island daily *Newsday*, before he embarked on biography. He is a tireless researcher and has a nose for the neglected detail and the buried story. But he also has an investigative reporter's weaknesses: a determination to "get the goods" on his subject, a tendency to let his excitement over an arduously researched "revelation" exaggerate its importance. There is a lot of heavy breathing and grasping of the reader's lapels in his books.

Caro's writing can also be overwrought. His work groans under self-consciously novelistic or scene-setting devices. In this book's very first pages we are for no clear reason presented with a full-page description of a room in the Senate, "narrow and drab, its two long walls a pale tan in color and undecorated except for a few black-and-white lithographs and dull green draperies" and a mirror: "Twice as tall as a man and wide enough to fill almost the entire wall, bordered in a broad frame of heavy gold leaf, it was a mirror out of another age, a mirror large enough for a man to watch as he swirled a cloak around himself and to check the way it sat on his shoulders—or, having removed the cloak and handed it to a waiting pageboy, to check every detail of his appearance before he pushed open those swinging doors."

Needless to say, no such man is ever produced—or any such pageboy, for that matter. Instead what we have is description for its own sake, a sign of a writer too much in love with his own prose. Both in treatment and in subject this book is twice as long as it should be. It would have benefited considerably from some ruthless editing.

It is also badly organized and un-

focused. Johnson, the ostensible subject, wanders in and out, disappearing for pages and even for whole chapters as Caro's fancy is caught by something else. But then, Caro does warn us early on that this book is not just about Johnson and the way he furthered his ambition by exercising his skills in the Senate; it is a study of "America's Senate itself."

Caro implies that his is the only truly authoritative biography of Johnson—that he and his wife, whom he credits as his co-researcher, have interviewed more witnesses and examined more archives than anyone else. But there are facts and there are facts. Everything depends on interpretation ... or omission. One does not have to be a post-structuralist to question such assurance about the nature of "truth," particularly when it involves declarations about human motivation.

Confidence in Caro's method and judgment is not reinforced by the attributions and notes that are meant to back up his quotations and assertions. Because there are no footnote numbers in the text, it is exceedingly difficult to determine his sources. For one chapter, boiled down from his earlier books, there are no notes at all. Interviewees are cited as sources regarding Johnson's actions and motivations without any indication of who they are or why we should trust their words. Whole conversations are presented in the text without the reader's being able easily to determine where they come from. The normal qualifier "according to" would be helpful to a reader trying to sort out opinion from fact.

In focusing so relentlessly on Johnson's ambition, Caro often loses track of Johnson as a human being. He tells us, for example, that Johnson was often, at least in public, not very nice to his wife, and was even unfaithful. But he does not tell us what it was about Johnson that made the universally admired Lady Bird so devoted to him. He also relates that Johnson had intense and prolonged affairs with two extraordinary women: Alice Glass, the mistress and later the wife of Charles Marsh, the publisher of the liberal *Austin American-Statesman*; and Helen Gahagan Douglas, a movie star who

was elected to Congress and then ran for the Senate from California, where she was defeated by a Red-baiting Richard Nixon in one of the many shameful episodes of the McCarthy era. But again, he treats these critical relationships as pesky intrusions that get in the way of following an amendment through a Senate subcommittee. A biography that reduces its subject to a political calculating machine, that in almost prurient detail unveils his ambition but ignores his heart, that fails to deal with the life of its subject and with the positive emotions that others deeply felt toward him, lacks an essential element of truth.

After three volumes and some 2,500 pages of text, Caro has still not been able to capture Johnson's complexity. Instead he is blinded by the cunning, even though impressed by the skills. He is indignant that Johnson was not like the liberal senators who "spoke of truth and honor" and meant it—the good Hubert Humphrey and others like him (who, of course, ended up serving Johnson to further their own ambitions). He is outraged that Johnson "was deceitful and proud of it." He has not yet been able to delve into Johnson as Robert Penn Warren did into his fictionalized Huey Long, in *All the King's Men* (1946), and as Billy Lee Brammer did in his novel *The Gay Place* (1961), still the best character study of Johnson.

But to have done so would have been to go beyond Johnson as a politician, to see him as more than a conniver who would do the "right thing" only if it cost him nothing and was sure to advance his interests. It would have meant not only examining the politics of "the years of Lyndon Johnson," which Caro does quite thoroughly, but also accepting Johnson as a complicated man driven by multiple impulses. Not as Shakespeare's malicious Richard III but, rather, as Schiller's torn and even tragic Philip II. Lyndon Johnson was a man of operatic dimensions. Robert Caro sees the action but doesn't hear the music. ▀

Ronald Steel's books include *Walter Lippmann and the American Century* (1980) and *In Love With Night: The American Romance With Robert Kennedy* (2000).

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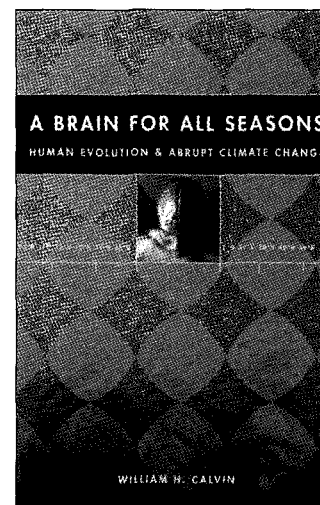
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A CAPITALIST PRIMER

Upton Sinclair's realism got the better of his socialism

BY CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

.....

Probably no two words in our language are now more calculated to shrivel the sensitive nostril than "socialist realism." Taken together, they evoke the tractor opera, the granite-jawed proletarian sculpture, the cultural and literary standards of Commissar Zhdanov, and the bone-deep weariness that is paradoxically produced by ceaseless uplift and exhortation. Yet these words used to have an authentic meaning, which was also directly related to "social" realism. And the most fully realized instance of the genre, more telling and more moving than even the works of Dickens and Zola, was composed in these United States.

Like Dickens and Zola, Upton Sinclair was in many ways a journalist. His greatest novel was originally commissioned as a serial, for the popular socialist paper *Appeal to Reason*, which was published (this now seems somehow improbable) in Kansas. An advance of \$500 sent Sinclair to Chicago in 1904, there to make radical fiction out of brute reality. The city was then the great maw of American capitalism. That is to say, it took resources and raw materials from everywhere and converted them into money at an unprecedented rate. Hogs and steers, coal and iron, were transmuted into multifarious products by new and ruthless means. The Chicago system created almost every imaginable kind of goods. But the main thing it consumed was people. Upton Sinclair tried to elucidate and illuminate the ways in which commodities deposed, and controlled, human beings. His novel is the most successful attempt ever made to fictionalize the central passages of Marx's *Das Kapital*.

The influence of Dickens can be felt in two ways. First, we are introduced to a family of naive but decent Lithuanian immigrants, sentimentally portrayed at a wedding feast where high hopes and

good cheer provide some protection against the cruelty of quotidian life. There are lavishly spread tables, vital minor characters, and fiddle music. Second, we see these natural and spontaneous people being steadily reduced, as in *Hard Times*, by crass utilitarian cal-

THE JUNGLE

by Upton Sinclair,
introduction
by Jane Jacobs

Random House/Modern
Library, 382 pages, \$9.95

culatation. They dwell in a place named Packingtown, and "steadily reduced" is a euphemism. The extended family of the stolid Jurgis is exposed to every variety of misery and exploitation, and discovers slowly—necessarily slowly—that the odds are so arranged that no honest person can ever hope to win. The landlord, the saloonkeeper, the foreman, the shopkeeper, the ward heeler, all are leagued against the gullible toiler in such a way that he can scarcely find time to imagine what his actual employer or boss might be getting away with. To this accumulation of ad-

versity Jurgis invariably responds with the mantra "I will work harder."

This is exactly what the innocent cart horse Boxer later says as he wears out his muscles on the cynical futilities of *Animal Farm*. Orwell was an admirer of Sinclair's work, and wrote in praise of *The Jungle* in 1940, but Sinclair may have been depressed to see his main character redeployed in the service of allegory.

Sinclair's realism, indeed, got in the way of his socialism, in more than one fashion. His intention was to direct the conscience of America to the inhuman conditions in which immigrant labor was put to work. However, so graphic and detailed were his depictions of the filthy way in which food was produced that his book sparked a revolution among consumers instead (and led at some remove to the passage of the Food and Drugs Act and the Meat Inspection Act of 1906). He wryly said of this unintended consequence that he had aimed for the public's heart but had instead hit its stomach.

There would be meat stored in great piles in rooms; and the water from leaky roofs would drip over it, and thousands of rats would race about



on it. It was too dark in these storage places to see well, but a man could run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of the dried dung of rats. These rats were nuisances, and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them; they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the hoppers together. This is no fairy story and no joke; the meat would be shovelled into carts, and the man who did the shovelling would not trouble to lift out a rat even when he saw one—there were things that went into the sausage in comparison with which a poisoned rat was a tidbit.

To this Sinclair added well-researched observations about the adulteration of food with chemicals and coloring. He also spared a thought, as did many of his later readers, for the animals themselves, especially (and ironically, in view of *Animal Farm*) for the pigs.

At the head there was a great iron wheel, about twenty feet in circumference, with rings here and there along its edge. Upon both sides of this wheel was a narrow space, into which came the hogs ... [Men] had chains which they fastened about the leg of the nearest hog, and the other end of the chain they hooked into one of the rings upon the wheel. So, as the wheel turned, a hog was suddenly jerked off his feet and borne aloft.

At the same instant the ear was assailed by a most terrifying shriek ... And meantime another [hog] was swung up, and then another, and another, until there was a double line of them, each dangling by a foot and kicking in frenzy—and squealing ... It was too much for some of the visitors—the men would look at each other, laughing nervously, and the women would stand with hands clenched, and the blood rushing to their faces, and the tears starting in their eyes.

Meantime, heedless of all these things, the men upon the floor were going about their work. Neither squeals of hogs nor tears of visitors made any difference to them; one by one they hooked up the hogs, and one by one with a swift stroke they slit their throats.

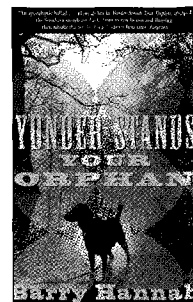
Again, the demands of verisimilitude have a tendency to work against the recruitment of any sympathy for the calloused and even brutalized laborer. Sinclair's title, *The Jungle*, along with

indirectly evoking the ideology of Thomas Hobbes, inverts anthropomorphism by making men into brutes. In her rather deft introduction Jane Jacobs dwells on the passage above and on the sinister implications of machine civilization without registering what to me seems an obvious point: Sinclair was unconsciously prefiguring the industrialization of the mass slaughter of *human beings*—the principle of the abattoir applied to politics and society by the degraded experimenters of the assembly line.

Eugene Debs, the great Socialist Party leader and orator of that period, announced that his ambition was to be "the John Brown of the wage slaves." This noble hyperbole was not all that much of an exaggeration: the lower orders in Chicago may have come voluntarily, to escape a Russian or a Polish house of bondage, rather than being brought by force from Africa to a house of bondage; but once here they were given only enough to keep them alive until their bodies wore out. Their children were exploited too, and their womenfolk were sexually vulnerable to the overseers. Indeed, the most wrenching section of the book comes in the middle, when Jurgis discovers that his wife has been preyed upon, under threat of dismissal, by a foreman. Not following the socialist script in the least, he sacrifices self-interest for pride and pounds the foreman to a pulp. By this means he swiftly discovers what side the courts and the cops and the laws are on, and is made to plumb new depths of degradation in prison. Among other humiliations, he stinks incurably from the materials of the plant, and offends even his fellow inmates. (We are not spared another Dickensian moment when he realizes that he has been jailed for the Christmas holidays and is overwhelmed by childhood memories.) Sinclair interrupts himself at this point to quote without attribution from *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (Oscar Wilde was not long dead in 1905), and it seems a sure thing that Sinclair would have read *The Soul of Man Under Socialism*, the most brilliant line of which says that it is *capitalism* that lays upon men "the sordid necessity of living for others."

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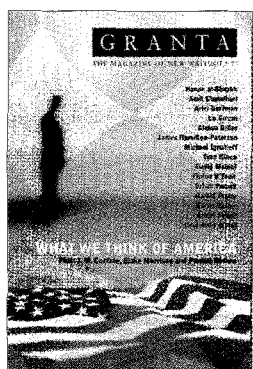
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Robert Tressell's novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914) is the only rival to *The Jungle* in its combination of realism with didacticism and its willingness to impose a bit of theory on the readership. In both "proletarian" novels the weapon often deployed is satire: the workers are too dumb, and too grateful for their jobs, to consider the notions that might emancipate them.

Jurgis had no sympathy with such ideas as this—he could do the work himself, and so could the rest of them, he declared, if they were good for anything. If they couldn't do it, let them go somewhere else. Jurgis had not studied the books, and he would not have known how to pronounce "laissez-faire"; but he had been round the world enough to know that a man has to shift for himself in it, and that if he gets the worst of it, there is nobody to listen to him holler.

But gradually, after being for so long the anvil and not the hammer, he awakes from his bovine stupor and comes to understand that he has striven only to enrich others. The book ends with the soaring notes of a socialist tribune of the people, and the triumphant yell—thrice repeated—"*Chicago will be ours*."

Before this happy ending, however, there is a passage that I am surprised Jane Jacobs does not discuss. A bitter strike is in progress in the stockyards, and gangs of scabs are being mobilized. They are from the South, and they are different. Indeed, the reader is introduced to "young white girls from the country rubbing elbows with big buck negroes with daggers in their boots, while rows of woolly heads peered down from every window of the surrounding factories."

The ancestors of these black people had been savages in Africa; and since then they had been chattel slaves, or had been held down by a community ruled by the traditions of slavery. Now for the first time they were free, free to gratify every passion, free to wreck themselves ...

This is no slip of the pen on Sinclair's part. He elsewhere refers to "a throng of stupid black negroes," a phrasing that convicts him of pleonasm as well as

of racism. It is often forgotten that the early American labor movement preached a sort of “white socialism” and—though Debs himself didn’t subscribe to it—that this sadly qualified its larger claim to be the liberator of the wage slaves.

The final way in which Sinclair’s realism got the better of his socialism is this: like Karl Marx in *The Communist Manifesto*, he couldn’t help being exceedingly impressed by the dynamic, innovative, and productive energy of capitalism:

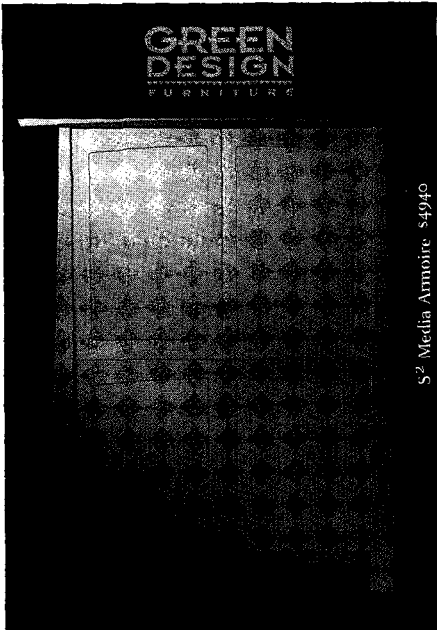
No tiniest particle of organic matter was wasted in Durham’s. Out of the horns of the cattle they made combs, buttons, hair-pins, and imitation ivory; out of the shin bones and other big bones they cut knife and tooth-brush handles, and mouth-pieces for pipes; out of the hoofs they cut hair-pins and buttons, before they made the rest into glue. From such things as feet, knuckles, hide clippings, and sinews came such strange and unlikely products as gelatin, isinglass, and phosphorus, bone-black, shoe-blackening, and bone oil. They had curled-hair works for the cattle-tails, and a “wool-pullery” for the sheep-skins; they made pepsin from the stomachs of the pigs, and albumen from the blood, and violin strings from the ill-smelling entrails. When there was nothing else to be done with a thing, they first put it into a tank and got out of it all the tallow and grease, and then they made it into fertilizer.

This account of the magnificent profusion that results from the assembly line and the division of labor is so awe-inspiring that Sinclair seems impelled to follow it almost at once with a correct and ironic discourse on the nature of monopoly and oligopoly: “So guileless was he, and ignorant of the nature of business, that he did not even realize that he had become an employee of Brown’s, and that Brown and Durham were supposed by all the world to be deadly rivals—were even required to be deadly rivals by the law of the land, and ordered to try to ruin each other under penalty of fine and imprisonment!”

Thus, though it lives on many a veteran’s bookshelf as a stirring monu-

ment to the grandeur of the American socialist and labor movements, *The Jungle* may also be read today as a primer on the versatility of the capitalist system. But not all its “morals” belong to the past. The anti-*Jungle* ethos lived on, in a subterranean fashion, through the League for Industrial Democracy, founded by Sinclair and Jack London. (Its junior branch, the Student League for Industrial Democracy, survived long enough to provide the auspices for the first meeting of Students for a Democratic Society.) In Eric Schlosser’s best seller *Fast Food Nation* (2001) the values and practices of the slaughterhouse system were revisited. Most of the reviews, rather predictably, concentrated on the shock effect of Schlosser’s intimate—almost intestinal—depiction of “hamburger” ingredients. But Schlosser also spent a great deal of time with those whose lives are lived at the point of production. Recruited, often illegally, from the Central American isthmus rather than the Baltic littoral, these workers are sucked into cutting machines, poisoned by chemicals, and made wretched by a pervasive stench that won’t wash off. Their wages are low, their hours long, their conditions arduous, and their job security nonexistent. The many women among them are considered bounty by lascivious supervisors, who sometimes dangle the prospect of green cards or safer jobs, and sometimes don’t bother even to do that. The health-and-safety inspectors are about as vigilant and incorruptible as they were a century ago. The main difference is that these plants are usually located in remote areas or rural states, so the consolations of urban and communal solidarity are less available to the atomized work force than they were to Jurgis and his peers. This nonfiction work is also a blow to the national gut; but if properly read, it might succeed where *The Jungle* failed, and bring our stomachs and our hearts—and even our brains—into a better alignment. ▀

Christopher Hitchens writes for Vanity Fair and The Nation, and is the author of Unacknowledged Legislation: Writers in the Public Sphere (2000) and The Trial of Henry Kissinger (2001). His review essay on recent books about Winston Churchill was The Atlantic’s cover story for April.



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MEN OF LETTERS

The decline of "amateur journalism"

BY BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

.....

The *Times Literary Supplement* was one of seven British weeklies that Dwight Macdonald examined in his celebrated 1956 article "Amateur Journalism." Macdonald disparaged American critics, who in his opinion examined intellectual and cultural subjects as either academics, wielding nonsensical jargon and producing articles characterized by a "cramped and cautious specialization," or "middlebrow" journalists, whose pieces struck a dreary, slick, and superficial "compromise between quality and 'what the readers will take.'" (In the process he gave *The Atlantic* an especially nasty drubbing.) But Macdonald lauded the state of journalism in Britain. The intellectual and literary journalists who wrote for the *TLS*, *The Economist*, *The Listener*, the *New Statesman and Nation*, *The Observer*, the *Spectator*, and the *Sunday Times* were driven neither to attract as wide and profitable an audience as possible nor to concentrate on the kind of recondite and absurd topics that brought advancement in the academy. Their reviews, criticism, and articles were instead "written with that pleasurable spontaneity, that recklessness (oddly combined, for an American, with a most impressive expertise) which comes when the writer is not trying to educate his readers or to overawe them or to appease them or to flatter them, but is treating them as equals." This engendered in the British weeklies, in contrast to their American counterparts, relaxed writing and a confident spirit. Macdonald assessed the dangers to the kind of writing he loved: although he is remembered mostly for his excoriation of "masscult" and the "middlebrow," he saw what he called "academicism" as the most corrosive influence on intellectual journalism, and that he viewed the British weeklies as above all the product of a culture in which "learning is not the

province of specialists but the common possession of the whole educated class."

To appreciate the specific history Derwent May chronicles in *Critical*

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Times, an exceedingly exhaustive biography of the hundred-year-old *TLS*, one must put into context the condition of the journalism that Macdonald praised. He referred to the type of writing that concerned him as "British literary journalism," and even when he wasn't specifically dissecting the *TLS*, he was mostly assessing the other weeklies'

concerned him as "British literary journalism," and even when he wasn't specifically dissecting the *TLS*, he was mostly assessing the other weeklies'

book criticism and reviewers ("the headlong rush of Pritchett, the neat, balanced style of Connolly"). Since the beginning of the nineteenth century book reviewing had played a remarkably elevated role in British intellectual life, largely defining the terms of debate on and discussion of political, religious, economic, scientific, historical, and biographical subjects as well as literature. The great British literary Reviews—the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly*, the *Westminster*, the *Fortnightly*, the *Saturday*, and a dizzying number of others—consisted, literally, of nothing but reviews. And most of the glut of magazines aimed at the educated classes—the *Spectator*, the *Athenaeum*, the *Academy*, the *Cornhill*, and so on—were likewise largely made up of reviews and review-essays. The book under review often served merely as a peg on which to hang a scintillating essay, and



the reviewer—a Macaulay or Carlyle, a Walter Bagehot or Leslie Stephen—was often far more intellectually distinguished than the book's author. "Review writing is one of the features of modern literature," Bagehot himself noted. "Many able men really give themselves up to it."

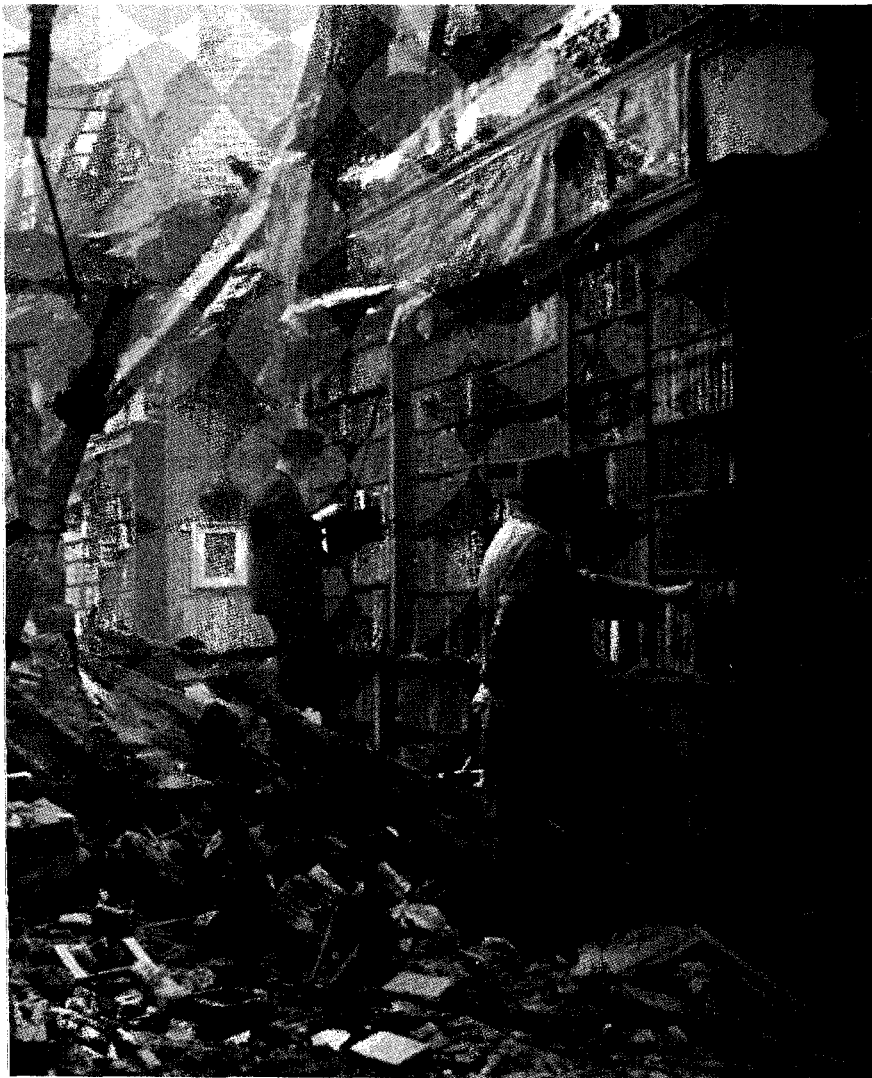
The genre attracted such stellar writers because although the nonfiction book was and remains the best vehicle for presenting evidence in support of a complicated, systematic argument, the essay—critical, analytical, often disputatious—generally allows for a greater intellectual boldness and originality. (Compare, for instance, Karl Marx's profound if cumbersome contribution to political economy, the three-volume *Das Kapital*, with his audacious, penetrating, and vivid "Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon," or even Michael Harrington's *The Other America* to Macdonald's far

more arresting and influential fifty-page *New Yorker* review essay examining it.) The essay also demands an unwavering stylistic mastery. As Virginia Woolf pointed out (in an essay in the *TLS* reviewing a collection of essays that were themselves mostly book reviews), the essay has no room for "the voice of the man stumbling drowsily among loose words, clutching aimlessly at vague ideas ... a book could take that blow, but it sinks an essay." In a two-volume biography, Woolf explained, "yawns and stretches hardly matter," but the essay must be "pure from dullness, deadness and deposits of extraneous matter." The essayist's learning "may be ... profound," but "it must be so fused by the magic of writing that not a fact juts out, not a dogma tears the surface of the texture." In this way, she noted, the great reviewer Macaulay has "blown more knowledge into us in the course of one essay

than the innumerable chapters of a hundred text-books."

The most astute assessment of the genre remains Bagehot's (no surprise) review-essay of 1855, in which he explained the form's development and appeal as consequences of the quickening pace of modern life: "There is, as yet, no Act of Parliament compelling a bona fide traveler to read. If you wish him to read you must make reading pleasant." Readers hungered to be exposed to what George Eliot, herself a prodigious reviewer, called "the lively currents of thought and discussion" scrutinized by the *Reviews* but would not, as Bagehot recognized, "indulgently and pleasantly peruse" the kind of solid, expansive scholarship characteristic of the past; they wanted their literature and scholarship "portable" ("as they take sandwiches on a journey," Bagehot wrote). Which meant, he concluded, that "in this transition from ancient writing to modern, the review-like essay and the essay-like review fill a large space." The essay-like review was unashamedly a form of haute vulgarization, but its practitioners refused to allow this to mean any diminution in intellectual vitality.

Reviewers did, however, admit that since their chief concern was boldness in both substance and style, their arguments might sometimes prove wrong. But, as the *Edinburgh Review*'s founding editor, Francis Jeffrey, explained to a prospective reviewer, what was lost in judiciousness was gained in verve: "To be learned and right is no doubt the first requisite—but to be ingenious and original and discursive is perhaps something more than the second in a publication which can only do good by remaining popular—and cannot be popular without other attractions than those of mere truth and correctness." Unlike the scholar, the reviewer, as Macaulay wrote, was not attempting "a composition meant to be uniformly serious and earnest." He was instead writing as he would speak: "He may blunder; he may contradict himself; he may break off in the middle of a story; he may give an immoderate extension to one part of his subject and dismiss an equally important part in a few words."



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This "bold, dashing, scene-painting manner" was as much a fresh intellectual approach as a new prose style. In contrast to the old-fashioned pedant, Bagehot wrote, the reviewer was "glancing lightly from topic to topic, suggesting deep things in jest ... passing with a more Shakespearean transition, connecting topics with a more subtle link, refining on them with an acuter perception, and what is more to the purpose, pleasing all that hear him, charming high and low ... fragmentary yet imparting what he says, allusive yet explaining what he intends." The great Victorian reviewers were as learned as scholars, but they wore their learning lightly; as Bagehot (whose own prose was a tissue of allusions and quotations, half of them unidentified or unexplained) asserted, "What truly indicates excellent knowledge, is the habit of constant, sudden, and almost unconscious allusion, which implies familiarity, for it can arise from that alone."

Combining cleverness, grace, and apparent omniscience, the review-essay was irresistible. When he looked back half a century to the launch of the *Edinburgh Review*, in 1802, Lord Cockburn, Jeffrey's biographer, wrote, "The effect was electrical. It is impossible, for those who did not live at the time ... to feel or almost to understand, the impression made by the new luminary." This impression extended across Europe. Napoleon and Stendhal were devoted readers, and Madame de Staël declared the publication "the highest pitch of human intellect." The *Edinburgh Review* soon spawned a host of other *Reviews*—so many that Carlyle marveled in 1830, "Reviewing spreads with strange vigor ... By and by it will be found that all Literature has become one boundless, self-devouring Review." Macaulay's essay-like reviews in the *Edinburgh Review*—written with unrivaled élan on topics ranging from Milton to Machiavelli and from "The Civil Disabilities of the Jews" to the origins of the Raj—were reprinted (in pirated and in authorized editions) as a collection of "essays" (as were the "essays" of most of the other great reviewers); that book became one of the great transatlantic best sellers of the nineteenth century.

The vogue of the review surely involved a new conception of both reader and writer; as William Hazlitt explained, the writers of his day existed "in the bustle of the world." The reviews were written by men of affairs for men of affairs. Jeffrey, who edited the *Edinburgh Review* for nearly thirty years, and who wrote well over 150 review-essays on novels and poetry, aesthetics, history, legal and social questions, and biography, always insisted that politics and the law were his vocations (he had a thriving law practice in Scotland, and he was a Member of Parliament and a Lord Advocate). Macaulay, the greatest *Edinburgh* reviewer, was, of course, an enormously popular historian, the author of India's reformist penal code, and an MP. Bagehot, whose review-essays embraced such subjects as literary theory, constitutional history, Shakespeare, and banking, was a financier, a businessman, and the editor of *The Economist*. John Morely, the editor of the *Fortnightly Review* and probably the most widely published literary critic of his day, was an MP, Chief Secretary for Ireland, and Secretary of State for India. Prime Ministers William Gladstone, Lord Salisbury, and Herbert Asquith were prolific and enormously distinguished reviewers. (Until the death of his brother and his consequent elevation to the peerage, Salisbury made most of his income writing for the *Saturday Review* and the *Quarterly Review*.)

Because the review-essay came to be regarded as the most convenient and stylish device for shaping the contemporary intellectual scene, the subjects the *Reviews* embraced were astonishingly broad. Even at the end of the nineteenth century the "criticism" in the *Reviews* treated philosophy, science, theology, and economics as well as fiction and poetry; and as late as the 1920s T. S. Eliot averred, in his essay "The Idea of a Literary Review," that the question of such a publication's scope turned on "the precise application of the term 'literature,'" explaining, "We must include besides 'creative' work and literary criticism, any material which should be operative on general ideas—the results of contemporary work in history, archaeology, anthropology, even of the more technical

sciences when those results are of such a nature to be valuable to the man of general culture and when they can be made intelligible to him." More surprising, the subjects individual critics addressed were equally broad. Just as the *Reviews* assumed that their readers would be interested in and able to appreciate a wide range of knowledge, so the reviewers assumed that specialized learning was a less important attribute for communicating with those readers than an astute mind and a facile pen. "There is something to be said," Morely wrote, "for the writer by profession, who without being an expert, will take trouble to work up his subject, to learn what is said and thought about it, to penetrate to the real points, to get the same mastery over it as an advocate or a judge does over a patent case or a suit about rubrics and vestments." In this way the reviewers, although professional writers, were amateurs, as Macdonald was to observe of their twentieth-century counterparts.

Thus these men of letters and affairs approached writing much as their audience approached reading, as part of their engagement with the world. Virginia Woolf rebelled against much of her Victorian heritage, but in praising what Samuel Johnson called "the common sense" of "the common reader," and in directing her critical work expressly and exclusively to that reader, she followed the approach of her father, Leslie Stephen (a monumental intellect, the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*, and a manic reviewer—he wrote three 8,000-word reviews a week). Her description of "the man who loves reading" (as opposed to "the man who loves learning") fits both the reviewers and their audience. "A reader," she wrote, "must check the desire for learning at the outset; if knowledge sticks to him well and good, but to go in pursuit of it, to read on a system, to become a specialist or an authority, is very apt to kill ... the more humane passion for pure and disinterested reading." The "true reader" (and reviewer), she elaborated, "is a man of intense curiosity; of ideas; open-minded and communicative, to whom reading is more of the nature of brisk exercise in the open air than of sheltered study."

A year after the death of Queen Victoria, *The Times* of London introduced a literary supplement intended, as the newspaper's editor declared, to occupy "the same position of authority in its narrower sphere as that of *The Times* in its wider sphere." Its animating spirit, as May nicely puts it, "was that literature was for keen general readers, not for specialists," and that therefore the new paper's "role would above all else be like that of an educated reader, helping other such readers to find the books that were most worth reading." Bruce Richmond, a *Times* editor and a man T. S. Eliot remembered for his "bird-like alertness of eye, body and mind," would effectively be the first editor of the *Lit Supp* (as it was known familiarly until the 1960s), and would remain at its helm until 1937. He saw to it that the publication carried out its role as the definitive guide for the general reader—and often with a panache surprising for the literary organ of the British establishment's rather gray paper of record.

The early *TLS* was in most ways indistinguishable from the great nineteenth-century *Reviews*. Like them, it conceived of the "literary" in the broadest terms; its first issue included pieces on Napoleon's Polish campaign, the Chinese frame of mind, and the poet-orientalist Edward Fitzgerald's letters. Very soon it had established itself, in Eliot's words, as not only "the best, but the most respected and most respectable" literary periodical of the time. (Its only rivals in these early years were A. R. Orage's largely avant-garde *The New Age* and the *English Review*, which in 1908 and 1909, when it was edited by Ford Madox Ford, was as brilliant a literary review as there has ever been in Britain.) Richmond's two highest achievements in these years won the *TLS* a permanent place in British literary history: he commissioned many of Eliot's best and most influential review-essays (particularly on Elizabethan and Jacobean drama and on the metaphysical poets) and, even more important, he discovered and nurtured Woolf as a literary essayist. Woolf wrote most of her criticism and her best criticism for

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Already, though, it was clear that the forces that Macdonald would eventually decry as blighting American intellectual journalism were transforming British intellectual and literary life and the *Reviews* that were its most prominent reflection. Richmond recognized that the *TLS* had “two publics,” which he characterized as those interested in “books for the drawing room” and those concerned with “books for the study.” This division within the educated classes would not have been nearly so apparent among, say, Woolf’s father’s readers, who didn’t draw such rigid distinctions between their entertainment and their enlightenment. Evelyn Waugh, whose father, Arthur, a quintessential Victorian and Edwardian critic, read to him as a young boy “most of Shakespeare, most of Dickens, most of Tennyson, much of Browning, Trollope, Swinburne, Mathew Arnold,” recalled that thanks to these readings, “I never thought of English Literature as a school subject, as a matter for analysis and historical arrangement, but as a source of natural joy.”

The dichotomy to which Richmond referred was itself both a symptom and a cause of another divide that over the years would be increasingly evident in the pages of the *TLS*. Waugh had described his father as a “man of letters”—“he wrote biography, essays, book reviews ... he read manuscripts for publishers, edited new editions of standard works,” and he “never had any other preparation for criticism than his own wide reading and genial tastes.” But, Waugh commented with characteristic wry bitterness, “that category, like the maiden aunt’s, is now almost extinct,” because “today that broad, smooth stream has divided: there are

the reporters of the popular press who interview authors rather than review their work; there are the charmers of *Television*; there are the State-trained professional critics with their harsh jargon and narrow tastes; and there are the imposters who cannot write at all, but travel from one international conference to another discussing the predicament of the writer in the modern world.”

Richmond delivered a similar evaluation, albeit free of vituperation, when, looking back at his tenure at the *Times Literary Supplement*, he noted that the paper itself had changed around 1926. May writes that although in fact “nothing changed dramatically that year,” Richmond “was thinking mainly of its metamorphosis from a general paper to a rather more academic one,” and then notes that by the late 1920s “the earlier brilliant lights”—such as Woolf, Eliot, Percy Lubbock, and John Middleton Murry—“were not contributing so frequently.” In 1938 the *TLS*’s regular fiction reviewer, Orlo Williams, wrote a series of three articles on literary and intellectual journalism and concluded that Britain was “once the home, now the grave, of the great [Review].” This prompted a letter to the *TLS* from Murry, who, anticipating Woolf’s lament the following year, in her essay “Reviewing,” declared that “book reviewing is a vanished profession.” Murry commented that writers who loved reading now often became academics, but that “a kind of paralysis appears to descend on the man of letters” upon entering academe. Indeed, the rise of the academic professionals—and their increasing and pernicious dominance of intellectual life—forms the subplot of *Critical Times*: repeatedly throughout his meticulous (usually month by month!) survey May observes that the *TLS* was in this period or that becoming more of an academic journal, as its readership, in a paraphrase of Woolf’s formulation, became more and more composed of those who loved learning rather than those who loved reading.

It’s a dispiriting story. Geoffrey Grigson’s 1975 complaint in the *TLS* echoed Williams’s, but by then the situ-

ation had grown much worse. Grigson noted that at least sixteen academics had written reviews for the April 25 issue alone. (He singled out one professor’s piece to show that “nearly every sentence in his five columns is blown up with stifling clichés ... culminating in arcane announcements fit for an academic’s Pseuds’ Corner.”) By the 1980s, May notes without comment, “The subediting and rewriting ... was extensive now, with more academics—who were not necessarily good writers—contributing.” And things only continued to slide. By far the most depressing pages of May’s chronicle are devoted to the turgid 1994 debate in the *TLS* over the merits of what its practitioners have dubbed “critical theory.” I defy anyone who has not attended a graduate seminar in literature in the past twenty years to explain one contributor’s assertion that the “developments of feminist critical theory, gender theory, and its offshoots in gay studies and queer theory, have revitalized literary study.” The *TLS*’s earlier pieces on fiction, poetry, and literary criticism—specifically Eliot’s and Woolf’s essays—are by far its most impressive achievements; but some of its more recent ones, bloated and nearly incomprehensible, undoubtedly represent the paper’s nadir.

To be fair, though, the *TLS*’s evolution away from the standards of a general cultural paper has been moderate. May’s term “academic journal” implies something the *TLS* is not. True, since the closing decade of Richmond’s editorship academics have made up more and more of its readership, and it has devoted itself more and more to somewhat specialized academic debates and findings. But it has usually treated them in a fairly nonspecialized manner: footnotes, jargon, and other scholarly apparatus rarely appear. Whether many of those debates and findings have justified the attention the paper has given to them is another matter; nevertheless, its academic reviewers, especially in history, have included some of the most daring minds and sparkling stylists the English-speaking world’s professoriat has had to offer. Moreover, the tra-

dition of the accessible, informal, and fluent review-essay is so ingrained in Britain's educated classes that the difference, which Macdonald found striking, between Britain's intellectual journalism and most of America's will long remain conspicuous. Furthermore, a great deal of the *TLS*'s academicism, as May's account shows, has tended toward a quaint bookishness, rather than toward the obfuscatory intellectual prose style that Macdonald abhorred in American academe. (In May of 1942, for instance, just after the German air raids on Exeter, Bath, and Norwich, in which 1,000 civilians were killed, *TLS* readers were treated to a piece titled "Minor Verse of the Regency Period.") Most important, the *TLS* experienced a renaissance of sorts from 1948 to 1958, the period in which Macdonald examined it, under the editorship of the cosmopolitan and most un-academic Alan Pryce-Jones, who covered and promoted European writers and philosophers and who hired Anthony Powell, the most accomplished regular fiction reviewer and fiction-reviews editor in the journal's history. (Powell dryly noted of the period after Pryce-Jones became editor, "TLS reviewers seemed to become a shade less stodgy overnight, a faint but perceptible odour of chic sometimes drifting through the caverns of Printing House Square.") And, of course, the *TLS* has always run significant, sometimes extraordinary, individual articles. Philip Larkin's two 1977 tributes to Barbara Pym alone more than justify its existence; Larkin's encomiums single-handedly won Pym the recognition that had so long and unjustly eluded her.

Still, the intensifying academicism of the *Times Literary Supplement* has narrowed and cramped it for most of its existence. Even with Pryce-Jones in the editorial chair, the journal couldn't rival the brilliant achievement of the *New Statesman and Nation*. Probably no writer in English has ever reviewed novels so consistently well as Cyril Connolly did for that magazine in the 1920s and 1930s. And from the 1930s through the 1950s, under the literary editorships of Raymond Mortimer and V. S. Pritchett (perhaps the greatest

English literary critic of the second half of the twentieth century), the *New Statesman and Nation* published pieces on books and ideas written by and expressly for nonacademics. Mortimer believed, as the magazine's official history puts it, that "professors took no trouble over their writing because having as a rule a captive audience, they were not obliged to compete for attention," and so he sedulously avoided them. Instead he sought in his authors the same outlook that Jeffrey, Hazlitt, Macaulay, and Woolf ascribed to the traditional man of letters: "a writer," Mortimer held, "should aim to please ... in a way that any tradesman whose work has an aesthetic attribute ... should aim to please."

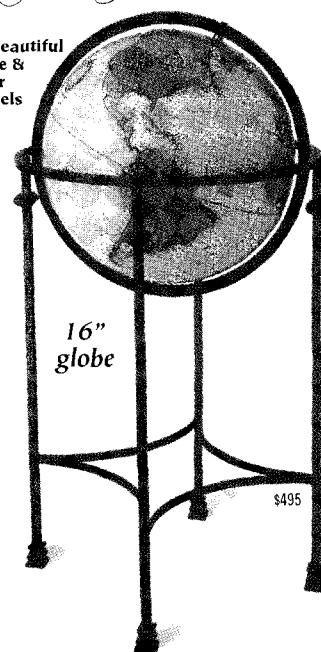
Bagehot attributed the flowering of the "essay-like review" in the *Edinburgh Review* partly to the system of learning in Scottish universities, which, in contrast to the pedantic, specialized scholarship prevailing in England in the early nineteenth century, encouraged its students to argue animatedly about literature, history, philosophy, and political economy, making "a man fancy he knows everything." That system, he asserted, tended "to cultivate habits of independent thought and original discussion," and thus "seems to have been designed to teach men to write essays and articles." The reader examining the great reviewers' essays is struck repeatedly by their sense of liberation from scholasticism, from what Bagehot called the "tedious ... painful words of an elaborate sage." As Hazlitt exulted, "Knowledge is no longer confined to the few: the object therefore is, to make it accessible and attractive to the many ... the cells of learning are thrown open ... Therefore, let Reviews flourish." And flourish they did.

The legacy of the great *Reviews*, which includes the *TLS*, was attenuated but intact enough in mid-twentieth-century Britain to beguile one of America's great public intellectuals. That legacy survives, but as May's history attests, the very academicism from which it once liberated writers and readers is now strangling it. ■

Benjamin Schwarz is a senior editor of The Atlantic.

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BOOKS

A GRAND CONTRIVANCE

Together, the Easy Rawlins mysteries constitute a sprawling novel of manners about black Los Angeles in the mid twentieth century

BY DAVID L. ULIN

.....

I don't put much stock in classifying novels by genre. The simple truth is that good writing is good writing, regardless of its form. I'm not saying that all fiction is equal, or that engaged reading doesn't require an

active, critical intelligence. But books like Raymond Chandler's *The Big Sleep* and James M. Cain's *Double Indemnity* are not merely great crime novels; they are works of literature, with all the intricacy and insight that implies.

The tricky question of genre has marked the career of Walter Mosley since the publication of his first novel, *Devil in a Blue Dress*, in 1990. Mosley, after all, is commonly known as a mystery writer whose reluctant sleuth, Easy Rawlins, inhabits the same desolate, sun-bleached southern California as Chandler's Philip Marlowe and Ross

Macdonald's Lew Archer, sharing much of the isolation and moral ambiguity of their hard-boiled universe. At the same time, Mosley has never been a traditional crime novelist; rather, he writes to serve a cultural agenda, and for him the mys-

tery is less a whodunit than a vehicle for exploring a way of life. On the most basic level this exploration is racial: Easy is a black man in a white man's world, and

his every action requires a delicate dance with convention, with the rigid social order of L.A. in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s—a landscape characterized by racist cops and housing covenants and the small, daily degradations of living on the color line. Still more significant, though, is the way that, read together, the Rawlins books—*Devil in a Blue Dress*, *A Red Death*, *White Butterfly*, *Black Betty*, *A Little Yellow Dog*—compose

BAD BOY BRAWLY BROWN

by Walter Mosley

Little, Brown
320 pages, \$24.95

a sprawling novel of manners about twentieth-century African-American Los Angeles that owes as much to authors like Dickens and Zola as it does to the aesthetics of noir. Here Mosley portrays a community largely overlooked in the city's literature, a shadow territory with its own code of ethics. This expansive vision has everything to do with Easy: an enigmatic figure, he is less a detective than a favor broker, a private citizen who gets involved in cases out of personal connection, and knows hundreds of people at all levels of income, education, and class. Easy spends time in bars, and with criminals and con men, but he also understands the quieter pleasures of domestic life. Characters and situations carry over from volume to volume, imbuing the whole sequence with an uncommon three-dimensionality, a vivid air of consequence.

For all the artfulness of the Rawlins saga, Mosley has always seemed a bit ambivalent about the enterprise, as if wary of being pigeonholed. As early as 1995 he branched out from the series with a blues novel, *RL's Dream*, which addressed the Robert Johnson myth, with mixed results. The following year, after the publication of *A Little Yellow Dog*, he began an extended sabbatical from crime writing, and then returned in 2001 with the stand-alone mystery *Fearless Jones*. In the interim Mosley bounced all over the literary map, writing two volumes of science fiction, two collections of stories about an ex-con named Socrates Fortlow, and a nonfiction book; he also issued his previously unreleased first novel, *Gone Fishin'* (in which Easy Rawlins first appears, as a teenager), through the small Baltimore-based Black Classic Press. His choice to focus on these books, which share with the Rawlins novels a sense of social vision, leaves the distinct impression of an author in search of something he's not sure that mysteries can offer: a context in which to be considered on his own terms. "We need to stop other people from ghettoizing our work," Mosley said in 1997, "and we need to stop ourselves. Mystery writers think of their readers as fans, but if a man reads your book, he's a

reader. By the same token, I'm not a mystery writer. I'm a *writer*." That's a telling comment, not least because it reveals how deeply the idea of genre continues to define the way we think about literary work. It's ironic that Mosley should even have to make this statement, because if his varied career proves anything, it's just how spurious such distinctions are.

All these issues—social commentary, authorial identity, the relationship between genre fiction and literature—come together in *Bad Boy Brawly Brown*, the sixth Easy Rawlins mystery. It's an excellent book, perhaps the best in the series (although I remain partial to *A Red Death*, with its bleak, corrosive portrait of Los Angeles in the McCarthy era), and it reads as if Mosley had never stepped away at all. This is owing primarily to the novel's set-up: taking place in early 1964, only three months after the conclusion of *A Little Yellow Dog*, it plunges us back into Easy's life with barely a caesura, picking up a host of conflicts that the previous installment left unresolved. Mostly those conflicts derive from Easy's personal life, beginning with the death of his best friend and protector, Raymond "Mouse" Alexander, for which Easy feels a great responsibility. There are also his two adopted children, Jesus and Feather, and the woman, Bonnie Shay, with whom the three of them live—a makeshift family that has developed throughout the Rawlins novels, providing both a grounding and a counterpoint to the world outside. That's a key motif in these pages, one to which Mosley returns repeatedly, and it's important because despite the novels' continuity, the L.A. Easy must now navigate has inexorably changed. *A Little Yellow Dog* closes with the Kennedy assassination, America's iconic loss of innocence; *Bad Boy Brawly Brown* opens in a brand-new era, with black activists preaching self-determination while the white elite uses every tool at its disposal to subvert them, including secret police-intelligence squads. "There's blood boiling under the surface of Watts," a police detective tells Easy early in the novel, in a whisper of the fires to come.

The fact that, unlike Mosley's characters, we confront these matters with historical hindsight is one of the subtle pleasures of the Rawlins books. This also gives the work its weight. History, after all, offers a way for Mosley to transcend the boundaries of plot and genre and tell his stories on a broader scale. Thus, although Easy's search for a young man who has run away to join the militant Urban Revolutionary Party may keep us turning pages, more momentous is what Easy's investigation reveals about the black community's struggle for autonomy and dignity—a struggle mirrored in the detective's life as well. Easy, too, is something of a runaway; he leaves Watts to buy a house in mostly white, mostly middle-class West Los Angeles and gives up the "economy of trading favors" for a job as head custodian at Sojourner Truth Junior High School. To his chagrin, however, he can never separate himself completely. Something always draws him back. Ever since *Devil in a Blue Dress*, Easy has been the quintessential man in the middle, part of his neighborhood but able to step outside it, a secret businessman (he quietly owns two small apartment buildings) who can't escape the street. In *Bad Boy Brawly Brown* such tensions are only heightened by the sense that for both Easy and the larger culture, things have reached a turning point. Mosley makes this explicit early in the novel, when, in the midst of a stakeout, Easy studies for a building supervisor's exam. He reflects,

Studying made me feel like I still had a foot in the workaday world that Feather needed me to be a part of. She needed every day to be the same as the day before and something to say when her friends and teachers asked what her daddy did for a living. I became that man for a couple of hours while waiting for night to come on.

This moment reverberates because of the depth of Easy's personality, his complexity, his obliqueness, our inability to pin him down. He is pulled by conflicting desires, conflicting obligations; like most of us, he understands that what he ought to do and what he wants to do are not always the same. At forty-four, with a family and a mortgage, he knows he's too old to be chasing hoodlums, but he can't deny the attraction—

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the way that in the throes of an investigation all his burdens fade away. This need for escape is only magnified by his guilt over Mouse, an emotion Mosley weaves through the story in the form of regrets, memories, longings, the seething turmoil of surviving a friend. Among the most unexpected aspects of the novel, in fact, is that even in death Mouse's presence lingers, like a sin Easy cannot expiate. "You let me die," Mouse reminds him in a dream—a scene that exposes Easy's demons without letting him off the hook.

Oddly, the complexity that marks Easy is often missing from Mosley's non-mystery fiction; Socrates Fortlow and Soupspoon Wise (the protagonist of *RL's Dream*), for instance, are far less nuanced, their likes and dislikes and motivations far easier to read. In the end, though, that just reaffirms the irrelevance of genre as a way of categorizing literary work. Easy is flawed: he makes mistakes and operates against his own self-interest much of the time. "It felt good to be lying again," he tells us. "It was as if I disappeared behind a cloud of black ink like the squid or cuttlefish." But he also recognizes his limitations—

and has no illusions about who he is. When a woman asks if she can trust him, he responds, "You can't ... How could you? You don't know me. You don't know who I know." It's a consummate Easy moment, ambiguous yet honest, in which the detective comes off not as a hero but, instead, as a human being.

Crime fiction ultimately represents nothing if not a grand contrivance—an approximation, rather than a reflection, of life. In the world outside mysteries, private citizens don't go chasing after killers and missing persons; they run and hide, or call the police, or fail to get involved at all. For Mosley, however, the highly stylized nature of the genre's conventions is less important than their ability to open a window on an elaborately imagined world. This is the intention of all literature, regardless of format, and with the Easy Rawlins novels Mosley has found a framework to make lasting points about the things that affect us most—the dynamics of character and interaction, and the difficulty of making one's way in the world. ▀

David L. Ulin is the editor of *Another City: Writing From Los Angeles (2001)* and of the *Library of America's Writing Los Angeles: A Literary Anthology*, to be published in October.

BOOKS

NEW & NOTEWORTHY

The making of the modern Middle East; grimly absurd humor in two reissued novels; the last word on Napoleon

.....

This is a masterly book. To produce his account of the Six-Day War the historian Michael B. Oren drew on thousands of pages of previously classified documents in Israeli, U.S., Russian, and British archives, and on interviews with diplomats, decision-makers, and commanders in Washington, Moscow, Jerusalem, Cairo, Amman, and Damascus. With a remarkably assured style, Oren elucidates nearly every aspect of the conflict—the historical background, the



SIX DAYS OF WAR

by Michael B. Oren

Oxford, 446 pages
\$30.00

strategic and domestic political context (in Israel and in the Arab world), the diplomatic negotiations in Washington and the UN, the military and political deliberations within Israel and the Arab capitals, and the air operations and often desperate and bloody ground battles. Most successfully, Oren dramatically and cleanly depicts the combination of self-doubt, hubris, and dread that accompanied Tel Aviv's decision to go to war, and the confusing and contingent nature of Israeli military and political calculations in the midst of the conflict. In writing his strategic chronicle, Oren has also drawn the most penetrating and sub-



tle assessment of the Israeli mind that I've encountered. Despite his no doubt sincere assurances that his is an objective account, Oren plainly takes the Israeli side, and his book refutes revisionist historians' interpretations of the 1967 war as a deliberate act of Israeli expansionism. Nevertheless, Oren is far too honest a scholar to treat Israel as a plucky David; he depicts Tel Aviv's military and political leaders as largely cunning and opportunistic realists (his pen portraits are elegant and revealing). Unless and until Egypt, Syria, and Jordan open their archives, Oren's will remain the authoritative chronicle of the war. His achievement as a writer and a historian is awesome. —BENJAMIN SCHWARZ

As good as these two novels are (and *Great Granny Webster*, shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 1977, is so funny, mordant, and harrowing that it might be a lost novella by the young Evelyn Waugh), both still risk being overshadowed by the notoriety of their author. The Anglo-Irish Lady Caroline Blackwood (1931–1996) bewitched many of the most creative and intelligent men of her time: she married the painter Lucian Freud and the poet Robert Lowell, obsessed the moody critic Cyril Connolly, was photographed by Walker Evans (who may have fathered one of her daughters), and had affairs with the editors Alan Ross and Robert Silvers, among others. Blonde, with intense, staring eyes, she could be disorientingly silent in company and then, after a few drinks, ribald, witty, and by all accounts irresistible.

Still, being a muse to genius wasn't enough for the glamorous Blackwood: she wrote nine books, including a highly imaginative study of the Duchess of Windsor, and when she died (alcoholism, cancer), she was embarking on a study of transsexuals. Dryly unemotional, almost reportorial, her

matter-of-fact style enhances the deliciousness in her depictions of stiff-backed old ladies, London playgirls, Irish con men, and fatuous journalists.

In the semi-autobiographical *Great Granny Webster*, set in a fifteen-year period soon after World War II, the ancient matriarch is a model of somber rectitude who spends most of her afternoons sitting bolt upright in a darkened drawing room. "Never having wished to receive pleasure, or give it, she forced one to admit that there was something admirably robust in the way she was totally devoid of any newfangled and slavish desire to please." Still, her daughter ends up talking to elves and fairies, her granddaughter takes "nothing serious except amusement" (at least until she commits suicide), and her great-granddaughter tends to stare disturbingly into space, looking "goggle-eyed and tongue-tied."

Throughout, Blackwood's humor tends toward the grimly absurd. In one scene a psychiatrist nearly rapes a semi-conscious woman who has tried to kill herself. Rebuffed, he is so ashamed that he remarks self-pityingly, "'Have you ever wished you were dead?' ... apparently quite oblivious of the tactlessness of his question." The longest chapter of the book evokes the sheer awfulness of the family's damp, crumbling ancestral pile, Dunmartin Hall: think of Gormenghast inhabited by characters out of Monty Python or *Cold Comfort Farm*.

In *Corrigan*—Blackwood's last novel—the widowed Mrs. Blunt finds her life reinvigorated when she meets the wheelchair-bound Corrigan, who the reader soon realizes is a quotation-spouting fraud out to charm the old lady for her money.

So what? says the widow's cook, after Corrigan disappears. "Corrigan was no different from most men. They all try to get the most that they can squeeze out of a woman. But he gave her a lot." At the end of this cleverly twisted tale Mrs. Blunt's daughter is



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by Caroline Blackwood

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COLLECTOR UPDATE

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George Hubbard

Roman Coins in an old bank building in New York State, the International Collectors Society has decided to offer them to the public.

Collectors and history buffs are scrambling to obtain the coins that history experts have traced to the reign of Constantine the Great, one of the most unscrupulous yet influential individuals ever.

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herself inspired by the absent Corrigan to dramatically change her own unhappy condition.

Yes, Caroline Blackwood was quite a siren in life, but these handsomely reissued novels show that she possesses the power of enchantment even now.
—MICHAEL DIRDA

The Penguin Lives series of short biographies has produced some provocative pairings of author and subject. Some of the choices have been solid and serious: R.W.B. Lewis on Dante, for instance, and Jonathan Spence on Mao. Others, such as Wayne Kestenbaum on Andy Warhol and Francine du Plessix Gray on Simone Weil, have been clever and slightly offbeat. Some—Roy Blount Jr. on Robert E. Lee and Kathryn Harrison on Saint Thérèse of Lisieux—are a bit of a stretch. The selection of the venerable British historian and right-wing gadfly Paul Johnson to write on Napoleon (who has been the subject of more biographies to date than any other human being except Jesus Christ) has turned out to be a wise one: Johnson is succinct, critical, and deeply skeptical of the Napoleonic legend.

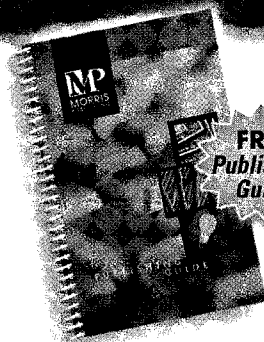
Nearly twenty years ago Johnson's *Modern Times* attacked the notion, long current among twentieth-century intellectuals, that "leftist" dictators were somehow more acceptable than the rightist or fascist variety; a dictator is a dictator, he asserted, irrespective of professed ideology. Now Johnson turns to Napoleon, the anti-idealist who believed in no principle except that of power, yet paved the way for the preaching ideologues who would take the stage more than a century after his death. Johnson finds Napoleon to be the originator of all the major aspects of modern totalitarianism: faked elections and plebiscites, government propaganda machines, large-scale espionage, and secret-police forces. "No dictator of the tragic twentieth century—from Lenin, Stalin,



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and Mao Zedong to pygmy tyrants like Kim Il Sung, Castro, Perón, Mengistu, Saddam Hussein, Ceausescu, and Gadhafi—was without distinctive echoes of the Napoleonic prototype,” he observes.

Johnson sees Napoleon as the ultimate opportunist, and believes that subsequent history has proved the narrowness and shallowness of his vision: “In the end, force was the only language he understood, and in the end it pronounced a hostile judgment on him.” The great soldier’s downfall, when it came, was spectacular. It is true that he changed the map of Europe, but the results were dubious, because in smashing up the decrepit Holy Roman Empire he cleared the way for the unification of Germany and the ensuing nationalism that would threaten and eventually eclipse France. And the achievement that made him, for a brief moment, the hope of liberal Europe—the apparent destruction of royal legitimism—turned out to be a chimera: the principle was authoritatively restored by the Congress of Vienna and lasted another century before it finally self-destructed in the maelstrom of World War I.

Although Napoleon was not evil in an obvious way, like Hitler or Stalin, he was surely one of the most ruthless men in history: in 1813 he told Prince Metternich, Austria’s Foreign Minister, that he would rather sacrifice a million French lives than accept terms he considered dishonorable. Despite France’s worship of this megalomaniac as the personification of its national *gloire*, history’s judgment on Napoleon will probably, in the end, be close to Johnson’s. “Had these events occurred at the beginning of the present century,” Johnson comments, “there can be little doubt that Bonaparte would have been obliged to face a war crimes tribunal, with an inevitable verdict of ‘guilty’ and a sentence of death or life imprisonment. The evidence then produced would have determined, forever, in the minds of reasonable people, the degree of guilt he bore for events that had cost four or five million lives and immense loss of property.” —BROOKE ALLEN

A reading group would have a field day with this elegant and complex study of two sisters: Rozzie, who works before the camera, and Jemma, who works behind it. Though the plot depends on a couple of elements that could easily lead to melodrama (Rozzie, the elder sister, becomes a movie star and then loses her sight), Cammie McGovern never strays even remotely in that direction. She remains focused, in this unusually accomplished first novel, on the intricate dance between siblings. Cleverly highlighting the differences in their perspectives, she explores the sisters’ intense interdependence, the roles they require each other to play, and the unintended influence of their expectations and experiences on each other’s lives. The conceits in *The Art of Seeing*—the sisters’ professions, for instance, and Rozzie’s blindness, which enables them to see beneath the surface of their relationship—can be a bit too heavy-handedly artful. But McGovern develops her literal story—in which Rozzie and Jemma alternately, and sometimes even simultaneously, support and betray each other—with such sincerity and sensitivity that this flaw is easy to overlook. In one of the best aspects of this novel, these extremely self-reflective characters tend to question their own motives. Wisely, McGovern doesn’t give them all the answers. —CHRISTINA SCHWARZ

In this careful study of “The US in the World Economy” (his subtitle), Robert Brenner includes more than fifty full-page tables documenting arcana such as “Manufacturing net profit rates indices: US, Germany, and Japan 1978–99” and the riveting “Index of corporate profits after tax net of interest versus New York Stock Exchange Index, 1980–2000.” This



THE ART OF SEEING

by Cammie McGovern

Scribner, 288 pages, \$24.00



THE BOOM AND THE BUBBLE

by Robert Brenner

Verso, 303 pages, \$23.00

strenuous statistical display is in the service of a question: Has the U.S. economy transcended the dynamics that led to more than twenty years of stagnation, 1973–1995, or will these re-emerge now that the economic boom and the stock-market bubble of the 1990s are over? Karl Marx, unmentioned by Brenner, defined the basic problem that afflicted the economy in the years leading up to 1973. It is the “anarchy of production,” which leads capitalists to keep making things even when no market exists for them, leaving too many goods for too few customers. Brenner argues that this—not the spike in world energy prices brought on by the Arab oil embargo of that year—caused the plunge in manifold measures of economic progress after 1973. Glut resulted in stagnation, and glut, according to a 1999 survey in *The Economist*, is returning: In cars alone “[there is a] 30% unused capacity worldwide—yet new factories in Asia are still coming on stream.” Over-investment and overproduction are the specters haunting the world economy.

For a hundred years after Marx the anarchy of production was sidestepped by the extension of markets within and among economies. Of equal importance was the invention of market arrangements—monopoly and oligopoly—that curbed the inherent disorder of capitalism. These inhibitions on the systemic tendency to glut weakened after the recovered European and Japanese economies began to export goods on a large scale to the United States. From 1965 to 1973 the rate of profit on the fixed capital assets of U.S. manufacturers fell by 43.5 percent. For worldwide manufacturing it fell by about 25 percent. The relative growth of the postwar era yielded to product-by-product competition between economies—Toyota versus Ford, for instance. The goal of U.S. economic policy over the next two decades, Brenner shows exhaustively, was to preserve our manufacturing base by manipulating the dollar, by enforcing selective protectionism, and by cajoling our trading partners into bailing out our manufacturers. U.S. manufacturers could have reacted to overcapacity by shifting resources “[from] over-supplied lines into new ones, where potential profitability was higher.” Instead they chose to make

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more of the oversupplied goods. To compensate for falling profits they cut costs, especially wages, which from 1979 to 1995 grew by only an average of 0.65 percent a year—the result, in part, of management resistance to organizing drives. Union membership among manufacturing workers declined from 38.8 percent in 1973 to 17.6 percent in 1995. But restraining wages, however sensible for an individual industry or company, was irrational for the economy as a whole, threatening to shrink even further the falling or debt-haunted demand that is oversupply's invariable companion.

In Brenner's account, the boom and bubble of the nineties expansion was a holiday from the underlying crisis, a triumph of euphoria that merely served the celebrators' own ends. Alan Greenspan emerges as a kind of Ponzi of the money supply, who fed the stock-market bubble to sustain the boom, inducing the "irrational exuberance" he decried.

If the uneven development of the postwar era allowed the United States and the recovering industrial economies to grow in tandem, the "uneven development in reverse" of the 1980s and 1990s

was more like a beggar-thy-neighbor growth, with the manufacturing economy of one nation flourishing only at the expense of another's. In the 1980s the Japanese and the Germans had to "rescue a crisis-bound US manufacturing economy that was being brought down by a fast-rising dollar in the context of international over-capacity and over-production." In the mid-1990s it had "become similarly necessary" for the United States to rescue the Japanese. Brenner is too much the scholar to venture beyond his evidence, but its implications are portentous. Future economic historians will make manufacturing in 2000 analogous with agriculture in 1900: just as the productivity revolution in farming meant that fewer farms and farmers were needed to supply growing numbers of people, the productivity revolution in manufacturing—robots in the role of tractors—means that manufacturing will be able to employ only a fraction of its current work force. The resulting shake-out will have incalculable social and political reverberations in the century ahead. Until it ends, the anarchy of production is likely to continue unabated. —JACK BEATTY

BOOKS

AS ENGLISH AS GOD

Ferdinand Mount brilliantly delineates social class

BY PHILIP HENSHER

.....

Ferdinand Mount is a curiosity among novelists—a writer so apparently anachronistic and traditional in manner that it amounts almost to eccentricity. To say that nobody else in England writes novels remotely resembling his is not necessarily to make a point about his originality; there used to be a great number of writers mining a similar vein.

Mount is the most alarmingly English of novelists, and his manner is unmistakably English in every sentence. A very amusing play by Michael Frayn, *Clouds*, begins with a conversation between two English people, each of whom thinks that the other is a foreigner; the sentence that

makes everything clear is "We have a certain dogged persistence that seems to go down quite well in some quarters." Mount's style announces his nationality in the same way; he is, in the old joke, as English as God.

The fictional accent is instantly identifiable as the product of a specific national school and, within that national school, of a particular social group. It is both exacting in its portrayal of physical properties and elegantly, Latinately abstract in its account of human motivations. On the exacting side:

Luncheon in village hall: cold ham and corned beef, green salad and pickles, apple tart and custard, two sit-

tings, please be punctual, bring your own knife, fork and spoon. I went to the children's afternoon tea: buttered, or rather margarine, buns, jelly, a few, not very many, cakes with the ineradicable taste of powdered egg.

On the abstract:

If that was indeed the intention, it had the reverse effect because, far from bathing God in a euphoric glow, this assumed geniality merely threw into higher relief the acerbic acuity which he displayed in his business dealings.

The fascination with specific inanimate properties and the Olympian summary of behavior through abstraction have, in the end, much the same effect—of restraint, of distancing the narrator from the rough-and-tumble of human passions. That is not to say that there is no passion here; indeed, the most characteristically English passages deal with a certain sort of physical ecstasy, conveyed in the halting, fumbling rhythms of English speech.

Once, just once, perfection. Like sitting in an armchair, the trainer said. That, yes, but much more, almost as if sitting in an armchair was the best sensation the human body could ever know, shrivelling to nothing the pleasures of love and wine; as if his whole life he had been bumping up and down on camels and switchback railways and pogo-sticks and motor-boats in a high sea, his vertebrae all jangled together.

It is worth saying that an English novelist of this stamp would never write about sex in such a manner. Mount is writing about riding a horse. But the intense Englishness of Mount's fiction is evident above all in an extraordinarily refined representation of social class. Vulgarity, social position, correct behavior, are everything here; a reader uninterested in fine distinctions of this sort will find *The Man Who Rode Ampersand* (first published in Britain in 1975) as baffling as Murasaki Shikibu's *The Tale of Genji*, and even in England the narrative may now need some amplification.

Mount occupies a curious position in English society, and the non-English reader may need a little explanation of his status. Before embarking on one, however, it is as well to indicate that Mount would almost certainly regard any explanation as itself vulgar in the extreme, and one tenders it only because his status bears directly on the peculiar qualities

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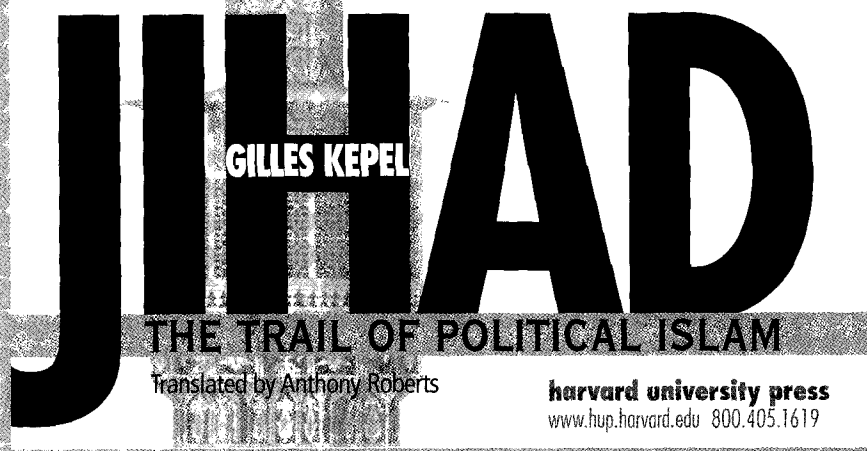
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Gilles Kepel is Professor at the Institute for Political Studies in Paris.



ANSWERS TO THE JUNE PUZZLER

S	P	R	A	W	L	T	E	T	R	A	S	D
S	E	E	D	R	E	A	L	I	O	B	O	E
I	N	T	R	O	A	R	A	N	S	O	M	S
N	S	A	E	N	D	I	N	G	I	U	E	I
B	E	I	N	G	L	E	G	E	N	T	E	R
A	C	N	E	C	A	G	E	S	H	U	G	E
D	O	S	T	O	X	O	T	O	A	G	O	A
F	R	O	M	B	E	G	I	N	L	E	S	S
I	N	S	E	T	R	O	N	T	E	N	E	T
E	P	E	N	E	N	O	K	I	S	E	W	R
S	A	G	I	N	A	W	E	M	A	R	I	A
T	R	U	E	S	M	A	L	E	C	I	T	Y
A	T	E	P	E	E	S	P	S	Y	C	H	O

"Layers"

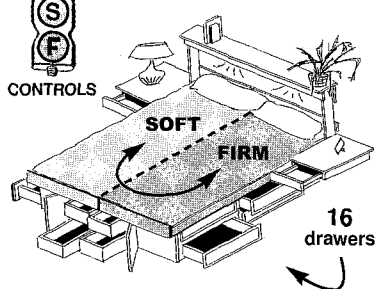
Layer 1 Across: 1. SPRAW + L (rev.) 6. TETRAS (anag.) 12. SEE + D 13. RE(g)AL 14. O + BOE (homophone) 15. INT(R)O 16. RAN(S)OMS (*Norma's* anag.) 17. (p)ENDING 19. BE(IN)G 21. ENTER (hidden) 23. AC(N)E 25. HU(C)E 28. F + ROM 29. LES'S 30. IN + S + EY 33. TEN(EY)T 35. (b)EN(OK) + IS 39. S(A + CIN)AW 40. M + ARIA 41. T + RUE 42. MALE (double def.) 43. CITY (odd letters) 44. T + EPEES 45. PSYCHO (hidden) **Layer 1 Down:** 2. PEN'S 3. RE(TA)INS 4. WRONG (anag.) 5. LEAD (double def.) 7. ELAN (hidden) 8. T(O) + INGE 9. A + BOUT 10. SOME (homophone) 11. D(E'S)IRE 12. SIN + BAD 18. I(N) + HALE 20. NET + M(E)N 22. EGOS (hidden) 24. CO(R)N 26. GENERIC (anag. ~ e) 27. A + ST + RAY 28. FI(E)ST + A 31. S(EC)UE 32. TENSE (double def.) 33. TH(M)ES 34. PAR + T 36. (e)NAME(l) 37. K(EL)P 38. WIT + H **Layer 2 Across:** a. LEC (hidden) b. C + ACES c. BEGIN (anag.) d. RON (hidden) **Layer 2 Down:** a. COB (hidden) b. LA(X)ER (*real* anag.) c. GET IN (anag.) d. SO + N **Layer 3:** (b)O(x)

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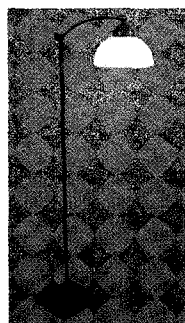
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of his fiction. He is a baronet, which, the reference books will explain, stands above a knight and below a baron in the orders of precedence. In reality there is nothing smarter in English society than a baronetcy. It is a sort of hereditary knighthood, and therefore confers a status that has nothing to do with vulgar effort on one's own part. On the other hand, it has no legislative role of the sort that comes, or used to come, with a hereditary peerage. The ostentation of English dukes and their social responsibilities are quite apart from your baronet; if the ancient English peerage notoriously looks down on the British royal family, the baronetcy rather looks down on the peerage as a lot of show-offs no doubt descended from one of Charles II's tarts.

Mount, however, has paid his way and made a pact with both the intelligentsia and the bourgeoisie. In the 1980s, when most English novelists were writing rather ill-informed and hysterical diatribes against Margaret Thatcher's government, Mount was running her Policy Unit. Subsequently he was, until very recently, the editor of the *Times Literary Supplement*, that august and impregnable self-assured organ of the English intelligentsia. In short, he knows everyone and goes everywhere. His fiction shows it.

The Man Who Rode Ampersand is concerned with social status in an unusually complex way. Harry Cotton, a jockey, is a splendid chancer, a fraud and an opportunist who lives on strokes of luck and gets along by the skin of his teeth. The title is a joke, in that Ampersand is a magnificent horse that a third-rate jockey like Cotton would never ordinarily get to ride. Before one race he takes the horse for a swift gallop over the fields, and for the rest of his career, to various disbelieving pub audiences, he becomes "the man who rode Ampersand."

To a non-English reader, Cotton may seem merely a hapless, inadvertent trickster, passing himself off as what he is not and getting into enormously entertaining scrapes. But in fact he fulfills with great exactness the traditional definition of a gentleman: one who is never unintentionally rude. Being rude on purpose, of course, is quite all right. Mount's territory, like that of Anthony Powell and Evelyn Waugh, is where gentlemen and near

thugs meet, and Cotton goes through the worlds of racing, daytime drinking in seedy pubs, and wartime service without ever quite being touched by any of the extravagant, louche behavior he falls in with.

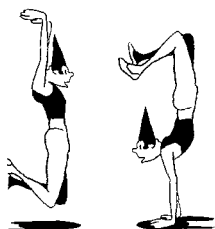
Like Powell and Waugh, Mount dwells on the effect of public events on weak private lives, but he is less the historian than the archaeologist. There is a strand in *The Man Who Rode Ampersand* about a Jewish woman's experiences in wartime Poland and Germany, but it seems rather half-hearted. The energy lies not in any historical sweep but in the re-creation of historical properties, and Mount's period details are as brilliant and unfaultable as Powell's. The horses are called what they would never be called now—Rubber Band, Robert the Devil, The Last of England. The metaphors, the comparisons, the heroes of pub conversations, are exact reflections of what the age would have dreamed of, and Mount is sometimes willing to sacrifice clarity for period flavor. When he writes "Drinks, cigarettes were wafted to him with the hesitant elegance of Gerald du Maurier fumbling for his lighter," it conveys not a very strong visual impression but a very clear sense of the period's heroes.

The Man Who Rode Ampersand has turned out to be the first in a series of novels, the subsequent volumes of which are about Harry Cotton's son, and the latest of which is the excellent *Fairness* (2001), but it seems most unlikely that Mount wrote it with that intention. The rhythms all imply a novel of just this length, without suggesting that more is needed. The payoff, too, is final and brutal.

The story of the grasshopper and the ant is grim enough as it is. Think how much grimmer it would be if the grasshopper had given birth to the ant. The ant's revenge would be a terrible thing.

But though it has been succeeded and surrounded by amplifications and expansions, *The Man Who Rode Ampersand* remains a fine, amusing performance on its own terms. It is unusually chewy, and if its manner appears eccentric now, readers must admit that it has attained that eccentricity by emulating the classic English novel. That is not a bad target to aim at, and there is something admirable even about a near miss. ▀

Philip Hensher, a novelist and critic, lives in London.



THE PUZZLER

by EMILY COX and HENRY RATHVON

Lost in the Funhouse

The diagram is a funhouse comprising five rectangular rooms whose boundaries must be determined. Solvers are invited to take a tour with the Across answers, starting in the upper-left square and proceeding right across the top row, then dropping to the second row and proceeding left, and so on back and forth until finishing in the lower-right square. Along the way riders will go in and out of the five rooms. In one room answers go backwards (that is, opposite the prevailing direction of a row); in a second answers are anagrammed; in a third answers each lose one letter; in a fourth answers each gain one letter; and in a fifth answers are replaced by their homophones (NEW would be replaced by KNEW or GNU). In every case a new word is formed in the grid. The lost and gained letters, taken in clue order, spell out a description of the funhouse experience. Answer lengths are withheld from Across clues. The Downs are completely normal and are clued in order column by column. There are four capitalized words among the clue answers and two more among the altered words in the diagram.

Last month's Puzzler solution is on page 193.

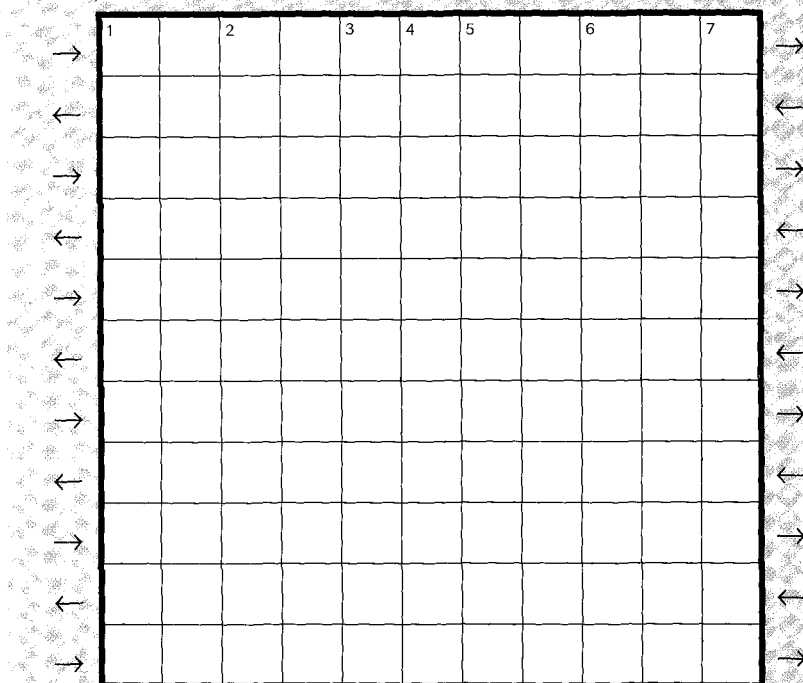
ACROSS

- A. Lady from Troy is scared silly
- B. Stuffing Dad roughly into part of a building
- C. From the sound of it, path went for a spin
- D. Purplish-red, Mom grabs a man
- E. Pistols surrounding empty openings in walls
- F. Restricted velocity in weird dreamy stretch
- G. Send back tire bouncing around Em

DOWN

- H. Journey to middle of graveyard in moonshine
- I. Experience pain and damage in street
- J. Wants rats he'd set loose
- K. Dug out object for the audience
- L. Location around uranium discharge
- M. Discerns weird tones
- N. Strangely lit case evokes an old Spanish kingdom
- O. Heading the wrong way, Dee's gripping green turf
- P. Turn away from members of cadaver troupe
- Q. Minute in reverse circling adult woolly creatures
- R. Antlered beasts in grass appearing in a mirror?
- S. Pounding pursuit of leviathans
- T. Thing in a bed with monstrous stare
- U. Forsakes rewards
2. See about new or old poet (5)
3. Circle bed by lake (7)
4. Unyielding barrier guarded by a diminutive soldier (7)
5. Political system concerning soldier and me (6)
6. A Greek's losing \$1,000 grants (6)
7. Pool competitor with time to be entertaining (6)

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.





WORD FUGITIVES

by BARBARA WALLRAFF

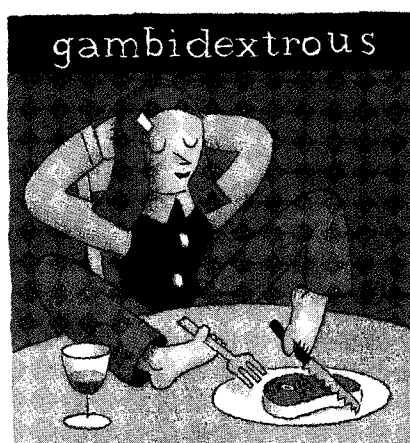
On the April Word Fugitives page a soccer coach requested a word analogous to *ambidextrous* but having to do with feet. John Siddeek, of Grand Junction, Colorado, responded, "I, too, am a soccer coach, and each season I give an award to the player who is the best at using both feet. I have titled this at various times the Ambipedal Award, the Bipedal Award, the Amphibian Award, and the Ambipedarocious Award." Siddeek went on to make a point also made by a number of other readers. For instance, Philip L. Salgado, of Spokane, Washington, wrote, "The word *ambidextrous* makes no reference to the hand: *ambi-* 'both,' *dexter* 'right.' Could not *ambidextrous* be used by a soccer coach to describe the desired skill and perhaps teach a little language as well?"

Readers had fun coining the likes of *switch kickers*, *bipedept*, *omnbootsman*, *bilegual*, and *gambidextrous*. But as it turned out, a less inventive approach achieved the goal brilliantly, earning top honors for the fellow who suggested it. "There is in fact a very simple term that is used by all coaches, players, and fans in the UK," wrote Allan Sutherland, of Aberdeen, Scotland. "It is *two-footed*, as in 'He's a *two-footed* player,' which is not so much stating the obvious as describing the ability to use either foot equally well. Though I can think of no other pastime except perhaps flirting under restaurant tables which can benefit from this skill, I would like both to inform you that the term is standard in football and to suggest that it might be used for all foot activities."

In response to the other April Word Fugitives question, "Is there an antonym for *synergy*?" Dan Littman, of Oakland, California, wrote, "My suggestion is not a new word and it isn't funny or flashy, but it is precise: *entropy* is the dispersion of energy, the exact opposite of *synergy*'s accumulation of energy." Thomas Ferrell,

of Miami, reported, "My dictionary gives *antienergistic* as an antonym for *synergistic*, in the sense of yielding to energy applied from without." *Chaos*, *cosinergy*, and *syntropy* were some other physics-major-type words proposed.

Emily Scott, of Newton, Massachusetts, wrote, "My dictionary defines *synergy* as 'combined or cooperative action or force,' and so in my quest for an antonym, *divorce* came quickly to mind." Brooks Fudenberg, of San Francisco, wrote, "Too easy! The antonym for *synergy* must be *saintgy*." Readers whose minds tend in yet other directions



offered up such suggestions as *government*, *bureaucracy*, and *Congress*.

Here top honors go to someone who answered the question with another question. Although other readers submitted similar responses, Bhagwan Chowdhry, of Los Angeles, got his in early and phrased it neatly. "Is looking for an antonym for *synergy*," he asked, "equivalent to looking for a synonym for *antergy*?"

Of course it would never occur to you to ask Word Fugitives either of the following: (1) what to call a boyfriend or girlfriend who is well beyond the age of being a boy or girl, or (2) what would make a good sex-neutral singular pronoun, to use instead of *he* or *she*, *s/he*, or

the increasingly popular but ungrammatical *they*. More than a few readers have already done so, however—and they're just never going to get an answer. For decades now our entire culture has been mulling over these questions, countless ideas have been floated, and none has managed to sail triumphantly into American idiom. Other questions about human relationships and what to call people, though, may yet repay inquiry. Here are two word fugitives that have also been sought by many, and apologies to everyone else who has submitted them that his or her name does not appear here.

BARBARA KELLY, of Palo Alto, California, writes, "The Russian father-in-law of my recently married son asked me what the English word is to describe our new relationship to each other as parents of the bride and groom. He offered the Russian word *svaty*, since there doesn't seem to be an English word."

And JACK COLE, of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, writes, "For 'mom and dad' we have *parents*; for 'brothers and sisters' we have *siblings*. What word do we have for 'aunts and uncles'?" Anyone who also suggests a word for "nieces and nephews collectively" earns extra credit.

Send words that meet Barbara Kelly's or Jack Cole's needs to Word Fugitives, The Atlantic Monthly, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, MA 02114, or visit the Word Fugitives page on our Web site, at www.theatlantic.com/fugitives. Submissions must be received by August 31. Use the same addresses to submit word fugitives that you'd like The Atlantic's help in finding. Letters become the property of Word Fugitives and may be edited.

Readers whose queries are published and those whose words are singled out for top honors will each receive, with our thanks, a selection of recent autographed books by Atlantic authors. The next installment's correspondents will be sent *The Character of Cats*, by Stephen Budiansky; *The CEO of the Sofa*, by P. J. O'Rourke; and "A Problem From Hell," by Samantha Power.

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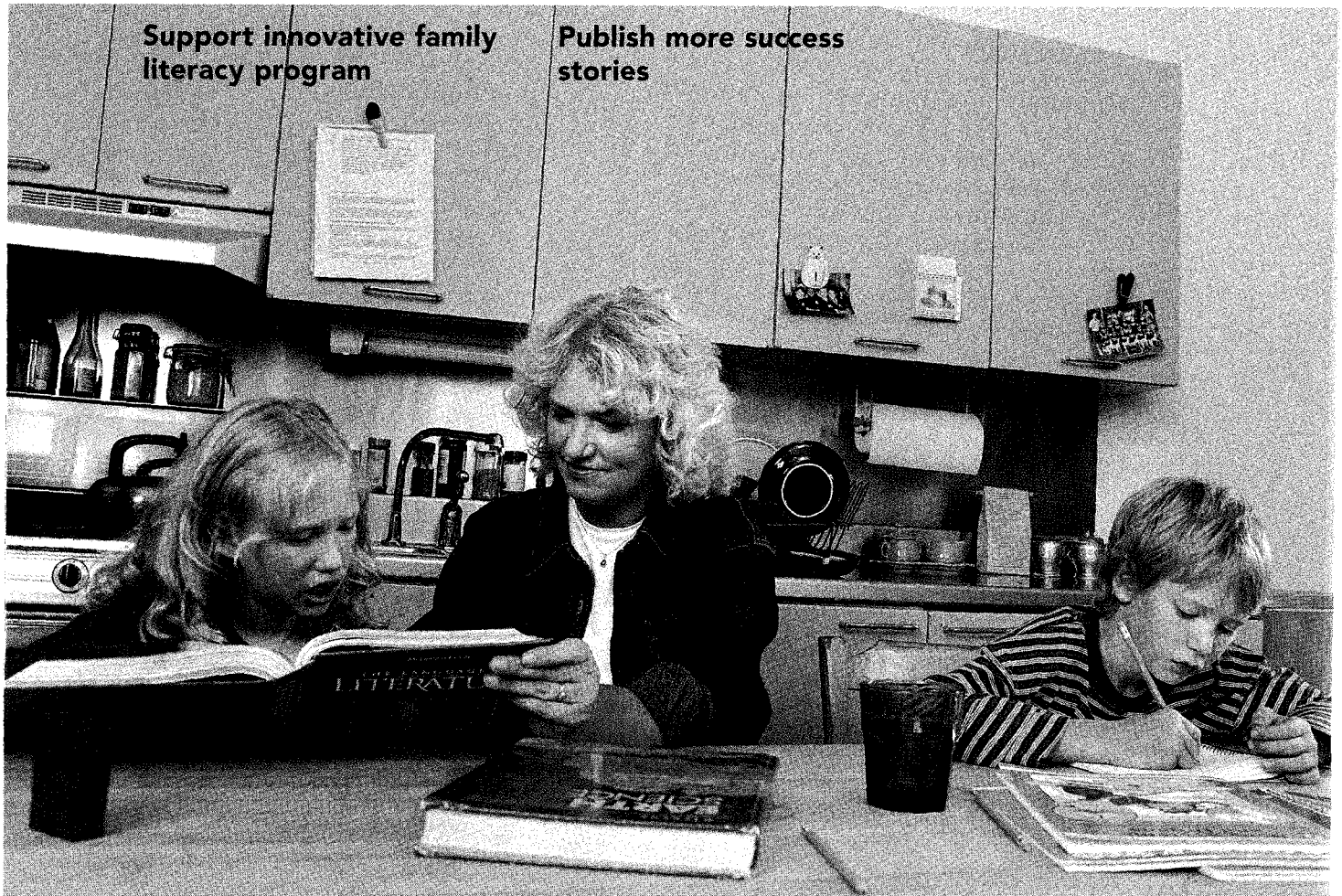
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